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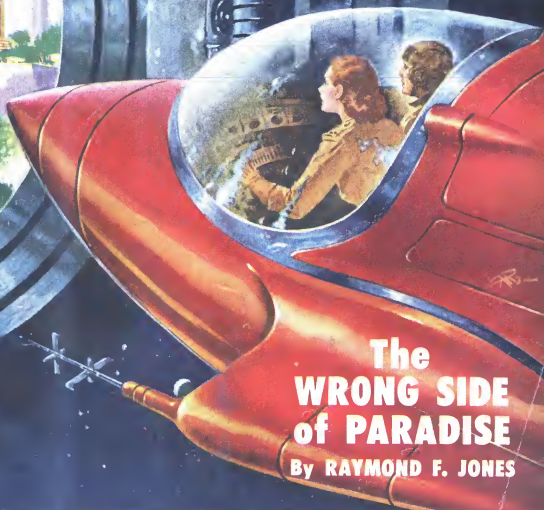
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# AMAZING AND STORIES



## The WRONG SIDE of PARADISE

By RAYMOND F. JONES

WHAT WAS THE FEARFUL SECRET OF THIS FORBIDDEN WORLD?

# MEN BEHIND AMAZING STORIES



————— Raymond F. Jones —————

**Author of:**

## **THE WRONG SIDE OF PARADISE**

---

**T**HERE'S one science fiction story I'll never read again—Wells' "War of The World". It was the first of its kind for me, and the thrill of that first contact with the realm of imagined science is something I never want to lose. I'm afraid the wonderful aura that went with

its reading would be hard to recapture now. But the memory of it will always remain.

That was in 1927 and *Amazing* published it. Ray Cummings and Ralph Milne Farley and Dr. Breuer and A. Hyatt Verrill were sketching the future

*(Continued on page 160)*

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Out there in space was a Promised Land, with every man a king, and every woman a princess. There was only one drawback: lovers of freedom went straight to Hell!

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating  
a scene from the novel "The Wrong Side of Paradise"

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The

# OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

RECENTLY a world renowned professor of philosophy, Dr. Gotthard Gunther, made the statement that American literature these days was largely nothing to get excited about—with the exception of “adult” science fiction, which he termed “distinctive.” Inasmuch as Dr. Gunther got his training at a university in Leipzig, is an authority on comparative cultures and has recently completed a voluminous work on non-Aristotelian logic—well, his opinions probably command considerable respect.

WHILE we were still chewing over the Doctor's views on s-f, somebody sent us a news clipping telling of an “adult” science-fiction radio series soon to hit the airwaves. The article went on to quote an unidentified spokesman who, as near as we could make out, felt it was the duty of “adult” s-f to point out what the world of the future *should* be like: its cultures, its form of government, its social and economic structures. The gist of the item seemed to be that it was up to the writers of such fiction to point out the errors mankind of the future must avoid.

BEFORE we finished digesting that eye-opener, darned if we didn't stumble across still another item having to do with science fiction. This one declared there was a growing number of “intelligent” readers of the genre—readers who demanded the kind of stories dealing with the projection

of present-day problems into the future and to set the stage so that the human race “*will be worthy of survival*.” (The italics are ours.) Such readers, the article was careful to point out, regard the straight entertainment type of science fiction with raised eyebrow and delicately twitching nostril.

WHAT'S going on around here, anyway? Are we falling into the hands of the intellectual snobs, the professional do-gooders, the teddily *avant garde* dilettantes? Are we about to be swamped by a gang of long-hairs who see in science fiction only a kind of indoctrination course toward making tomorrow's world *their* kind of Utopia? Is every story supposed to be a blueprint for controlled living, one depicting as ideal a world where isms are more important than people?

NO thinking person can regard the present state of the world as ideal. The free peoples of Earth are in the midst of a struggle such as they've never faced before in recorded history. But when anyone tries to tell us that “adult” science fiction, and its writers, can lead the rest of the world into a rosy future with two helicopters in every garage and a private space yacht tied to the flagpole—that's where we hand out the succulent raspberry!

FOR OUR money there's far too much yammer about “adult” science fiction, anyway. Nobooy—least of all your editor—says that bang-bang space opera is the only good type of story in the field...although there are many readers who love exactly that kind of yarn. But this lofty attitude toward solid adventure, fast-paced action and characters who draw a sharp, well-defined line between good and evil, smacks of snobbery and is a credit to neither editor, author, nor reader. Far too many of all three have taken on, with the upsurge in science-fiction's popularity, the air of a working stiff who has suddenly inherited a million bucks. For Heaven's sake, let's not take ourselves too seriously in the matter of science fiction, let's not lose our perspective, let's not—most of all—lose our sense of humor!

—HIB



"For Pete's sake, willya hurry up with that piccolol!"

# YOU'LL HAVE TO GUESS!

By

RALPH COX

SCIENCE-FICTIONEERS have often proposed story backgrounds in which the laws of physical science do not hold. Most scientists, however, would shudder with horror at such an idea, for so far as we know, the laws of physics hold for the farthest star and galaxy as well as for this planet.

It is surprising, therefore, that such an eminent chemist as Pauling dares to suggest that we cannot be sure, and that it is perfectly possible that in the reaches of space beyond us, there may be conditions utterly beyond the grasp of what we know as scientific "laws." Pauling implies that as we probe deeper into the atom we are likely to find that many ideas we have held hitherto will be shattered. So far little is known of the reactions that occur in the nuclei of atoms; similarly, little is known of remote space. It is known, however, that strange phenomena are being uncovered in the realm of the nucleus—events which seem to contradict all we know of scientific experience. Therefore, Pauling asks, is it not possible that the over-all operation of the universe may be incredibly different from what we imagine it to be?

Startling as this concept is—and it is only an idea—it does make us pause and realize that we have only extended our laws by extrapolation, not by experience nor experiment, to the stars and galaxy systems. Any scientist will admit there is no experimental evidence to require this to be true beyond that brought us by the telescope and spectroscope. And that is not enough.

Perhaps the answer will be found in laboratories and observatories here; perhaps we'll have to wait until Man extends his technical tentacles farther. Perhaps the answer will come from some theoretician with a brilliant flash of insight—as occurred in quantum theory and relativity. Whatever the case, our confidence is somewhat shaken. Science has begun to realize that it is not omnipotent and that there are more things to be delved into than have been delved into. But progress is only made slowly—rarely in a jump. We need not despair that the answer will fail to be given. Right now somewhere on this Earth, a glimmering of the truth may be filtering into the minds of men...

\* \* \*

## PANIC — THE REAL DANGER

By

JOHN WESTON

FACING THE future realistically, authorities are making a strong effort to arouse an awareness of the need for shelters against atomic and hydrogen bombs. For in spite of the awesome ferocity of these destructive agencies, commonsense can arrange for excellent protection. Naturally those directly beneath or in extremely close contact with such an explosion cannot hope to evade it. But as for the rest, these explosions are remarkably like hurricanes in their initial blast and the same sort of defensive measures are taken, with the added risk of radioactive burns or poisoning. Otherwise, protection against blast and flame are extraordinarily like protection used in tornado and hurricane areas.

The main thing to do when warning of a bombing is given is to seek shelter preferably deep in the ground surrounded by concrete walls and with a non-collapsible roof over your head. Fortunately most ordinary homes have within them, with slight modifications, these protective devices. The cellar of an ordinary home, with its windows covered with boards to prevent glass blast, its thick concrete walls, its supply of water and portable lighting

equipment, its portable radio, and perhaps a bracing beam or two, makes an ideal shelter at distances surprisingly close to the danger area.

The greatest enemy in bombing, as in any public disaster, is panic. If you remain cool and calm, facing the emergency with intelligence, as did the bombed out victims of England and Europe in the last war, even the terrors of atomic bombing will be resistable. Actually radioactivity is the only really new addition to the bombing effect and this is generally comparatively short-lived as Nagasaki and Hiroshima testify. Civilian agencies have made plans to map immediately any radioactive areas and to notify citizens within those ranges.

It is not a nice future to look forward to, the thought of facing atomic and hydrogen bombs, but on the other hand it is by no means a hopeless one, as certain defeatists and pessimists would conclude. Someday the war-madness will be banished and the dictatorial anarchists who would destroy an Earth through their power-lust will be no more. But that will come only if the "common people" exert their own courage and skill!



# THE WRONG



*By Raymond F. Jones*

**Nobody died to get to this Paradise. Was  
it actually Heaven — or a Hell of a place?**

# SIDE OF PARADISE



In the instant before the giant snake struck, Scott saw his own face mirrored in the flaming eyes!

**"T**HERE'S NO use kidding ourselves." Doc Hodges paused and spat a brown tobacco stream onto the immaculate concrete apron of the spaceport. "It isn't much of a ship, but it's a shoe-string to start on and we'll work it into a whole boot before this summer is out or my name ain't Doc Hodges."

Bill Scott grinned wryly. That wasn't much of a risk for Doc. He had changed his name so many times in the course of his spotty career that even he had forgotten which one he started out with.

"No, it isn't much of a ship, as freighters go, but a busted up soldier back from the wars can't be choosy," said Bill.

The two men walked slowly beside the red hull of the little cargo carrier, the *Mote*. Even its fifty-foot length seemed long to Bill, whose limping walk was still painful after an unlucky ray shot had put him out of commission the day before peace was signed to end the four year Venusian war.

Doc himself managed a pretty lively pace on a wooden leg gained an unknown number of years before because of some private space battle.

"The thing we've got to do," said Doc, "is concentrate on the carriage trade until we can get a bigger ship. Luxury stuff like this cargo of orchids from Venus and pearls from Pluto. That's where the dough is. Leave the big muscle work of hauling fifty ton beams and machinery to the hefty boys who like that stuff. While they wear out their muscles, we'll be making the dough."

"I only hope you're right," Bill said.

The *Mote* represented every cent that he owned in the world. After his medical discharge he had taken his bonus and put it with the meager savings he had hoped to get married on

before the war. He put all of it into the *Mote*. The marriage plans had vanished when his fiancée had married someone else two months after he left. He knew that he would never plan and save again for such an event.

No, the rest of his life was going to be spent on the starways. The war had given him a taste of it, and he knew it was in his blood to stay. Earthbound jobs and clock punching and coming home every night to dinner were all right for the guys who liked that sort of thing—and who had someone to provide the dinner.

The *Mote* was a fast little express ship that had been sold by the government as surplus. Because he agreed with Doc's theory of trade, Bill had bought a small, fast ship, rather than a large one. They would concentrate on small express shipments that had to get places in a hurry.

**B**UT ANOTHER idea had been brewing in his mind for days. He said suddenly, "Doc, what do you know about Derelict Sea?"

"Nothing—except that it's a good place to stay away from. At the last count there were about one thousand ships milling around in there, and no one has ever come out of it. You aren't thinking of adding the *Mote* to the pool, I hope."

"Somewhere off between Jupiter and Uranus, isn't it? I've never had occasion to be near it, you know."

"Yeah, that's about it. Say, listen, Bill, you—"

"Ever stop to think what a wonderful salvage haul that would be. Doc?"

"You idiot! Every salvage outfit in the System has at least one ship in there—permanently. Cargo is our line, not harebrained salvage projects. Now just forget about Derelict—"

"But we aren't making enough money. We've got to make a lot of

dough if we ever expect to build up a business that amounts to anything. This hauling daisies across the Solar System isn't going to do it for us."

"They ain't daisies," Doc exploded. "They're rare orchids and we get a nice fee for hauling them—enough to suit me."

"Maybe it's old age," Bill said musingly. "Funny that you'd get cold feet just thinking about those thousand ships milling around in Derelict Sea with their ports hanging open and no sign of life."

"Why, you young pup!" Doc's false teeth clattered loudly with his excitement. "I walked barefoot across Pluto's mountains before you could even crawl around in three cornered pants. I've got guts enough to supply seventeen men like you and leave enough over for three boys. Cold feet—!"

"Okay, Doc. That's all I wanted to know. By peculiar coincidence I find in checking our course to Pluto that we go smack through the region of Derelict Sea. Just wanted to know what you thought about sticking to that one before figuring a new one."

"But we don't know anything about salvage! That's a highly specialized business these days."

"The *Queen of Mars* alone ought to net us half a million, don't you think? She's one of the newest liners in there."

"The best outfits in the business have given up long ago." Doc's forehead was beaded with sweat. He realized he had been dragged into the most fateful argument of his career and he was losing fast.

"Listen, Doc. This isn't a problem of salvage. Salvage is going out and lassoing a beat-up ship and dragging it back to a port. As far as we know, every ship in Derelict Sea can still move under its own power. All we have to do is go in there and fly them out."

"All!" Doc exploded. "Then why hasn't someone done it long ago?"

"Well... There's something keeping them in there, obviously. Our problem is to find out what that something is. Now, I've got an idea—"

"An idea! I should tie up with a daydreamer like you and lose my hide for an idea!" Doc's teeth clattered loudly.

"The *Mote* is one of the series of ships on which the Sherman-Hagerman drive was installed," Bill said. "Now, this drive is no good at all on a large heavy ship, but it has worked wonders on the little fellows. Have you ever wondered why no ship with an S-H drive was ever lost in Derelict Sea?"

"I don't know that it hasn't."

"Well, I do. I've been thinking of this for a long time and I've looked up the records of the ships lost in there. It's logical that, with all the ships there are in space, at least one S-H drive should have been lost. But there isn't even one in there."

"So what?"

"So I think that there is some kind of natural force field in space that is holding those ships and preventing them from getting loose. But the properties of the S-H drive make it immune to that force."

"Yes, and if that is so, why is the port of every derelict open? Why has there been absolutely no sign of life?"

"There are some questions that my theory doesn't answer right off, of course. But the point is that we have an S-H drive and no S-H has ever been caught in Derelict Sea. That fact alone makes me think it would be a safe gamble to go in and investigate. In fact, I'm determined to do so. You don't have to if you'd rather not, Doc. Seriously, I'm not trying to egg you on. I know there's risk, but it's the kind I like to gamble against."

"So you're trying to keep me from

going, now?" Doc sputtered. "Listen, you just try and keep me from coming along. I'm going to prove what a damn fool you are, and when we're stuck and helpless in Derelict Sea I'm going to sit there and laugh and laugh—before I figure out how to get you out of the jam you're getting us into."

AS THEY entered the flight office of the spaceport, their ears were assailed by the clatter of teletype machines and the static crashes from a dozen open receivers. The sound poured out of the communications room, making a bedlam in the vicinity of the counter.

The counter was a long wall on which were posted flight notices and information and regulations for the benefit of spacemen. Usually three or four pilots were scanning the clip files carelessly, but today no less than twenty-five were competing for space in front of one particular notice.

Bill halted a pilot just leaving the crowd. "What's up?"

"Derelict Sea—they've forbidden the entire area. And just when I was getting a hankering to see how close I could brush it with my tail flaps and not get caught."

Bill whistled softly and Doc grinned smugly. "Shall we see if we can pick up another order of daisies around here before we leave—or would you rather plot our new course first? The one dodging Derelict Sea?"

Bill made a reply. Doc knew that, because his lips moved, but the words were inaudible in the sudden thunderous roar that broke somewhere in the sky above the port.

The pilots rushed to the door and Bill followed. Outside, in the shining summer sky, a black freighter was weaving drunkenly towards Earth, a long trail of thick smoke behind it. The roar of its erratic rockets was like the sound of battle.

"Doc! Why aren't they getting out the emergency squad? That ship's going to crash!"

Doc looked up lazily at the crazy twisting of the freighter. "Naw, she's all right. Watch and see."

"All right! Anybody can see it's going to crash!"

"That's Ma Jergens," said Doc. "There's a saying among spacemen that when Ma's on the throttle there's thunder on the starways. And that's no lie. You can practically hear that old crate of hers in the dead vacuum of space. Good old Ma. If she'd been a fighter pilot we'd have won the war in a week. The only trouble is that she couldn't get inside anything smaller than a medium freighter."

By now the black ship had made a semblance of an attempt to level out for a landing, but the tail was spinning in a circle as if all the tubes on one side were dead.

"She'll never make it," Bill said. "The fire squad ought to be out there."

"You'll see," Doc said.

AT THAT moment the thunder died as the motors were cut off. The nose of the ship dropped sharply, then the tail kicked down to level it out and the ship banged and squealed against the surface of the field. Slowly it rolled to a stop not far from them.

Every pilot who had been watching gave an unconscious sigh of relief. One of them wiped his brow. "Ma's a chiseling old deadbeat," he said. "But she can sure fly for my money."

They always hoped, but never quite dared believe that Ma Jergens would make it down in safety. Bill had heard of Ma and her ancient crate, the *Dartmoor*, before. Hardly a spaceman from Mercury to Pluto who could properly claim the name had not heard at least the name of Ma Jergens and her rusty tub—and



BILL SCOTT

her daughter Letha, whose beauty was as far famed as her mother's piloting skill.

Abruptly the port of the *Dartmoor* banged open. From where he stood Bill had supposed it to be a pretty good sized opening, but the figure that emerged reminded him of dough being squeezed through a keyhole.

Then Ma Jergens was on the ground, waddling forward with a gait that would make a duck seem as graceful as a ballet dancer. She smiled broadly and waved to the pilots, who gave her a brief cheer.

"Hi, boys—how was that for a landing? Not bad with fourteen rear tubes burned out. That shows what kind of a tub the old *Dartmoor* is. Anybody want to buy a ship?"

"What d'ya mean?" said a pilot. "Don't tell us you and that old hulk are separating."

"Yep." Ma slapped a leg that was like a tree trunk in slacks. "This old hulk and that old hulk are separating. That was the last set-down. From now on I'm riding in style. There she is, boys, the *Packet*."

Everyone glanced down the field where a great shining new freighter almost dwarfed the *Mote*. For days

it had been a matter of speculation who the *Packet* belonged to. Now they stared at it incredibly.

"Ma Jergens is in the moola, boys. Line up and present your bills."

In the back of the crowd Doc muttered through his teeth, "Now where do you suppose that old biddy got the dough to buy a ship like that? She hasn't hauled enough cargo in the last year to pay for a coat of paint on the *Packet*."

Bill watched her bulbous, over-alled figure disappear into the flight office to file her report.

Doc was cursing softly. "She hasn't had enough jobs in the last year for a coat of paint—"

Bill laughed. "Don't let it get you down. Maybe we can find where she struck the pot of gold and get one ourselves."

"But she never had enough to pay her fuel bills," Doc insisted. "Joe Evans used to carry her a thousand gallons behind all the time, then it got to be two, and he finally crossed it off the books. Half a dozen other dealers have done the same. Incidentally—look! There's what most of these guys are hanging around to see."

Bill's eyes followed Doc's gaze back to the *Dartmoor*. A second figure, one with proper proportions, stepped gracefully to the landing field.

"That's Letha, the daughter. She's mechanic and co-pilot for Ma. Never misses a trip with her."

**I**N SPITE of his avowed lack of interest in women since his recent experience in being thrown overboard, Bill could not refrain from staring a long moment at the girl who came running towards the office.

Her head was graced with a mass of tumbled auburn hair that was blown back by the gentle breeze in the air. She could not be more than twenty, he thought, and the white

overalls did little to hide the loveliness of her figure.

Then, disgusted with himself, Bill turned away. "Better get our cargo checked for takeoff," he said. "I want to recheck our trajectory."

"You mean work out a new one? That's a long job."

"I said 'recheck.' We're not changing."

In the flight office, Bill stood at the counter, copying the coordinates of the area now closed to flight. It not only included the actual space known as Derelict Sea, but a large margin on all sides. It was a sizable chunk of space. Even if he were going to obey the order—which he wasn't—it would require considerable change of plans and more fuel.

As he stood there, an aura of delicate perfume enveloped him. It was so faint that for a moment he thought the wind had blown a gust from the patch of blooms outside the building. Then he glanced aside and saw Letha beside him.

"Hello," she said pleasantly. "Any news?"

Mentally he cursed the sudden confusion within him. Hadn't he learned his lesson well enough to keep a pretty smile and a dainty figure from doing this to him?

"Not much," he growled with more unpleasantness than he planned. "Just roped off Derelict Sea to keep crazy fools out of it."

"Dere—" The girl's face went suddenly white and she stared at the notice.

Bill stared curiously at her agitated face. "It's a big spot," he said. "Kind of changes your plans if you had a trajectory through that part of the System."

"Yes—yes, it does," she said. Her smile was nervous now. She turned abruptly away and hurried into the chart room.



LETHA JERGENS

Bill watched her go, his eyes upon her in frank admiration. It seemed incredible that Ma Jergens could have been the mother of that slim beauty.

He wandered on into the chart room to check the coordinates he had copied. He glanced about expectantly for Letha, but she was not visible in the aisles between the racks of maps and star charts that he could see.

HE WAS moving down the length of a rack to find the chart he needed when he suddenly heard the muted, contralto voice of Ma Jergens in heated argument on the other side of the rack. She was with Letha and an old man.

"I don't give a hoot what the brass hats say!" Ma Jergens whispered hoarsely. "I've been flying when and where I wanted to for forty years now, and if I want to keep on going into Derelict Sea, I'm going to do it. I don't intend to let any man tell me what to do at this late date. Your father was the last one that tried that and he ended up full of regrets! We're not changing our plans!"

"But, Mother. There'll be patrol ships all over the region. We can't possibly get through them. They'll

turn us back if we stop at their challenge and they'll fire on us if we don't. It's illegal now. We've got to give this up!"

"And lose the *Packet*? I've worked forty years to get a ship like her. Any time you think you've had enough of space tramping you can quit. I've tried a thousand times to get you to settle down with one of these goggle-eyed pilots and raise a bunch of kids. That's the job for a woman, not this chasing around the stars."

"Speak for yourself, Mother. Why don't you give up with tramping and go back to Dad?"

"That's different," Ma Jergens said with finality. Then she turned to the old man. "You can tell your friends to meet me at the abandoned copper company's field at Dakar Point, Mr. Munson. We'll pick you up there and continue with plans according to our previous agreement."

"That will be satisfactory, Mrs. Jergens." The third voice was wheezy and cracked as if it belonged to a very old man. Bill could not see him clearly through the bars of the chart racks. Then he realized he had no business listening at all, but he could not force himself away. The mention of Derelict Sea was a magnet that held him.

"I do hope this prohibition will cause no trouble with the flight," said Mr. Munson. "We are so anxious to make the trip."

"There won't be any hitch, grandpa," said Ma Jergens. "You be there and we'll get you where you'll never have to worry again."

There was a sudden shuffling of feet, and Bill Scott moved hastily away. From the seclusion of a chart table he watched the shrunken creature, who was evidently Mr. Munson, shuffle away. The man appeared to be about seventy-five and in a bad state of repair. Bill wondered where

in the System he wanted to go, and why he didn't go in one of the regular liners instead of Ma Jergens' freighter.

But the voice of Ma and Letha were raised again indiscreetly.

"You're going to land us in jail!" the girl stormed.

"At least we'll be able to eat well when we get out."

There was the sound of rustling bills over there, and then Ma continued, "Twenty head at ten thousand apiece. That's not bad, I'd say. It beats hauling cement and bricks in the old *Dartmoor*. The *Packet* will be paid for in six months at this rate. We're leaving tonight so let's get our gear transferred to the *Packet* before it gets any later."

Ma Jergens waddled out of the chart room, Letha following determinedly in her wake, like a graceful sloop behind a lumbering tug.

**B**ILL REMAINED over the charts for several minutes. Their trajectory would take them directly into Derelict Sea, all right. But his mind was busy pondering over what he had heard. Finally he rose and went out to the *Motc*.

Doc was busy with last minute touches to make things shipshape. Bill said, "There's someone who knows how to get in and out of Derelict Sea."

"Yeah? Who?"

"Ma Jergens."

Doc straightened with a jerk that loosened his upper plate. "Ma? What does she know about Derelict Sea?"

"She's flying old men in there for ten thousand dollars apiece. What do you make of that?"

"You're crazy! Where'd you hear that?"

"Eavesdropping."

"It doesn't make sense. Ma doesn't



know anything about science—not enough for her to figure a way in and out of there. Besides, what is she hauling old men in there for?”

“That’s what I’m asking you.”

“Aw—I don’t believe it. Anyway, the ban on flight through that area will fix that.”

“On the contrary, Ma is defying the ban. I heard her assure one of her customers that she’d get him where he’d never have to worry again.”

“What did she mean? I don’t like the sound of it.”

“Neither do I. I don’t like the sound of the whole thing. Neither does Letha. She wants Ma to give it up, but Ma loves the rustle of folding money too well.”

“Yeah—she would,” Doc said moodily. “Well, as I see it it’s no skin off our noses. But Letha—”

“Yeah, Letha,” Bill said slowly. “I hate to see her mixed up in a thing like this.”

“We couldn’t—I mean—” Doc looked at Bill. “Letha—”

“Sure we can. You’ve still got an eye for feminine pulchritude haven’t you, you old walrus? We won’t let a pretty girl like her get caught in a jam because of that old harpy of a mother of hers, will we?” Bill put a hand on Doc’s shoulder.

“I knew—Letha’s father,” Doc said slowly. “He was a fine man. He’d want me to do this because I was his friend.”

“Okay. They’re taking off tonight. We can postpone takeoff until about the same time. And it may be helpful to us to know just how Ma gets out of Derelict Sea. The *Dartmoor* doesn’t have an S-H drive, so it could be that my theory is all wet.”

IT WAS midnight when they actually filed their time of departure. The *Packet* had left an hour before, but they wanted to give Ma time to

pick up her mysterious passengers.

As the *Mote* rose swiftly, and Earth dropped away beneath them, Bill and Doc sat back comfortably in their inertia control chairs. Life seemed suddenly very good again as the old thrill of space filled them. To some pilots it became mere commonplace after the first few times, but never to Doc and Bill.

They set the course graphs into the automatic pilot and got up from their seats. Bill stepped to the tiny bar. “Like a drink?” he asked.

“Sure,” Doc said.

Bill drew two tall glasses of tomato juice. This was the strongest stuff allowed in space. Spacemen had long before learned that liquor and space ships didn’t mix, and Doc had been taught so severe a lesson in his youth that he never touched anything stronger than milk either aboard or on land.

They turned up the radio for last minute news from Earth, for soon the broadcast channels would be too feeble and all they would get would be the high frequency stuff necessary to keep them in touch with the planets and patrol ships.

Some dance music filtered out, but Doc snorted impatiently. “Let’s see what the news in the System is.”

Bill adjusted the receiver. “Just in time,” he said.

The blare of the announcer’s voice filled the room, then the commentator’s voice took over. “The biggest news today is, of course, the tragedy which overtook the greatest and newest of Earth’s great liners, *Empress of Titania*, late this afternoon, Earth Eastern time.

“The *Empress* radioed about an hour before that a revolt had broken out, in which the passengers overpowered the crew and took control. We know nothing of the purpose behind this unprecedented action. No communication was received after the

mutineers took over."

"Greg Lawson was aboard that ship," Bill said.

"Almost at once," the announcer said, "the course of the great vessel was changed and it was driven directly towards the heart of Derelict Sea. This was after Director of the Space Patrol Cummings had issued orders prohibiting flight near or into that area. The Patrol was called and a boarding attempt was made, without success.

"So today the greatest ship yet trapped by Derelict Sea lies in its treacherous clutches. The fate of its thousand passengers and crew members is unknown. Perhaps we never will know, for the *Empress of Titania* hangs in space, her great ports open, her hatches swinging wide, air and life gone from her—a helpless derelict, wandering through time and space like the ship of the Flying Dutchman, guided by ghosts."

"Pleasant fellow," Doc said.

"I saw Greg Lawson just once after he got out of the army," Bill said. "He was already signed up for radio-man, third, on the *Empress*. He was as proud as a kid with a new red wagon. This must have been his first flight, poor devil."

THEY MADE no attempt to contact the *Packet*, but midway in the flight they got a radar identification and location of her coordinates. She was behind them, so they slowed to let her pass. By alternating watches and slowing their time senses alternately with the drug, *Tempora*, which made an hour seem like a minute, they shortened the apparent length of the two-week journey. On the thirteenth day they began tracking the *Packet* in earnest.

Doc picked up the new freighter on the plates. "There she is—heading straight for the middle of Derelict

Sea. I don't see any patrol ships."

"There's one—off to starboard. And he's spotted the *Packet* too. He's signaling Ma to stop."

"Check her speed. She's accelerating at a blackout pace. She's going to try running the blockade, all right."

"And we're right behind her—but we stand more of a chance of running into that Patrol ship. Hang on, I'm adding the gees."

Automatically, the inertia control increased as the acceleration of the little *Mote* mounted to a terrific figure. But the *Packet* maintained its lead and even increased the distance between the two ships.

An alarm suddenly rang within the ship.

"The Patrol!" Doc exclaimed. "They're signaling us to stop."

Bill stepped to the communicator panel. "Freighter *Mote* responding. Go ahead."

"Patrol Cruiser *Sybellus*. You are ordered to stop and proceed no further on present course. The area of Derelict Sea is forbidden to any closer approach."

"We're not going in," said Bill. "We're trying to halt that freighter, *Packet*. They seem to be out of control, and we're closer than you are. This is an S-H drive we're using. We can reach the *Packet* if anyone can."

"Interception is the job of the Patrol. You are not authorized to go nearer."

"The hell with you, then. Stew in your own red tape. We're overtaking the *Packet*." Bill cut off.

Doc's face was a pitiful thing to see. "Bill! Do you realize that was a patrol cruiser that you just told off. We'll never see daylight once they jug us."

"They've got to catch us first," said Bill grimly. He stepped the acceleration to the maximum limit and their senses suddenly wavered and the

room grew fuzzy.

From somewhere there came the distant sound of the alarm again, then a coruscating blast exploded near the ship, sending its blinding light through the port. Dully, Bill realized the Patrol was firing upon them.

He glanced at the screen. The *Pack-et* was even farther ahead. It was surprising what powerful inertia controls she mounted. And now the dim graveyard of space was visible. The occupants of Derelict Sea stood out like faint ghosts in the night of space. A thousand of them milling eternally in the void, derelicts drained of life by this treacherous fault in space. Their ports were open like blind eyes and their ramps were down as if the passengers had simply walked out into space and vanished.

Somewhere in the *Mote* a plate creaked as it twisted against its neighbor, and Bill wondered dully if the ship were falling apart. Another—closer—blast came from the cruiser.

Then blackout possessed him as consciousness fled.

**A**T A PRESET time, the automatic controls cut down the tremendous acceleration of the ship to allow the men to return to consciousness.

It returned to Bill suddenly, as always, as soon as the blood circulation was restored to his brain. But what he saw as light came swimming back to his eyes made him doubt that consciousness had returned.

The ship was flooded with golden light streaming through the ports as if from some warming sun in an atmosphere of Earth or above the red and yellow sands of Mars. He put out a hand and shook Doc who was still groggy from the flight.

"Hey, Doc! Wake up. Look—!"

"Huh—?"

Doc stirred and opened his eyes wearily, and then his upper plate

dropped with a clatter as he gasped. "Bill—what's happened? Where are we?"

He stared, speechless, out the ports and into the vision plates. The *Mote* had slowed; was almost motionless now. The acceleration control was at zero and power was off, though Bill couldn't remember cutting it.

They were coming to rest beside other great ships of space—small cruisers, great freighters, mighty liners. They stopped beside the *Empress of Titania!*

"Bill—is this—? It can't be!"

"No, we're not dead. But this is something new, all right. Where's the *Packet?*"

Doc shook his head. The freighter of Ma Jergens was not to be seen.

Bill came up to the port window beside Doc and stared out towards a distant golden city where tall spires reached to a golden sky and silver motes danced in the sunlight. Birds soared gaily through the air, and trees with green and crimson leaves moved as if in summer breezes.

"It isn't real," Doc whispered hoarsely. "I've heard of mirages in space but I've never seen one before."

"Mirage? It looks like pretty solid substance that the *Mote* has settled on."

"But if it's real, where *is* it? Nothing like this was visible a few minutes ago."

"Another dimension, another space, a twisting of Time—who knows what it might be?" Bill said. "It could be any one of a thousand things. I've an idea we're going to find out before we're through, but the important thing is what has become of the occupants of all these ships?"

"There's some of them, I suppose."

Doc pointed towards the gardens beyond the field where the ships lay. Groups of people idled in the park or lay on the grass. Others were moving

along the avenues. "You know, I'm beginning to get a theory," he said. "About this coming back business. Wherever this is, consider it—look at that city! Remember Earth and its filth, the sand and dirt of Mars, the terror and death of Heliopolis. Maybe we won't want to go back, either."

Bill sent him a sharp look. "Don't let it throw you, Doc. Maybe it's real and maybe it isn't. Either way it's only a dose of hasheesh for us. It's not for Earthmen."

Why he said that then, he didn't know. It was only that a sense of terrible alien forces at work about them settled upon his mind. Yet, in a moment, he felt he was wrong. He felt as if a blanket were being thrown about his mind, protecting his thoughts from despair and dissatisfaction. Perhaps Doc was right—they might not want to leave this golden city.

"Let's go out and have a look around," he suggested.

"Better test the air—if any. Dog-gone it, I still think it is all imaginary. We're in the middle of Derelict Sea. We know what it looked like before we blacked out. There was nothing like this here then."

"Is that a mirage too?"

**DOC STARED** in the direction of Bill's pointing finger. A long avenue led through the center of the gardens and ended at the field. It was lined with waving trees, and coming down along it was a procession out of some wild dream of Bacchus. It was a scene out of ancient Greece with the gods and goddesses come to life.

Dancing flower girls spread blossoms upon the avenue of gold. Behind them, prancing elves tootled high pitched melodies on silver flutes, and gay unicorns drew a lavish carriage of purple and gold.

But it was the figure within the



DOC HODGES

open carriage that brought gasps to the throats of Doc and Bill.

"Letha!" Bill exclaimed hoarsely. "Doc, look—"

"Letha!" Doc breathed. "But how could she—?"

Bill remained speechless before the vision that slowly approached the *Mote*. The procession wound about the corner of the avenue and turned directly towards the ship.

The fairy princess, clad in gossamer veils, lying on the carriage drawn by unicorns, was unmistakably Letha. The worried look that Bill had last seen in her eyes was gone now. Her face was not merely relaxed; it was joyous, as if she were experiencing the greatest happiness a mortal could know.

The faces of all in that procession seemed to share the same exhilaration, as if this were a world of happiness, a city of joy.

"Let's get out there and see what this means," said Bill. He whirled and strode to the port.

Doc said, "I've got the feeling that we're going to wake up and find this is a nightmare that'll leave us with the screaming meemies."

"There's only one way to find out. Come on."

There was no hiss as he unscrewed the clamps and threw open the port. The air outside was at Earth normal pressure. It was filled with the scent of flowers that made the interior of the *Mote* seem stagnant and foul by contrast, though the conditioner kept the air pure within the ship.

Following Bill, Doc jumped to the ground as he put his hand to his mouth to keep his plates in.

The procession halted and Letha rose to a sitting position and waved a slim, white arm, tossing them a handful of flowers. "Welcome to Paradise, starmen. Welcome to the city of happiness."

"Letha!" Doc blurted. "Letha—it's me, Doc Hodges. Don't you know us? Here's Bill—you saw him in the flight office before takeoff."

Letha's laugh was a merry tinkle, and it brought little tears to her eyes that made them glisten like stars. "Of course I know you. That's why I'm so happy to see you here. I was hoping so much that you would come. That's why we led you here, knowing you were trailing us."

"But where is it? What place is this?" Doc persisted.

"Paradise—Paradise of Derelict Sea. Do you wonder that the ships that find their way here never return? Who would want to leave this golden city of gladness and joy for the dirt and filth and unhappiness of the planets they have known?"

"But *what* is it? Why can't it be seen from—from outside?"

"All your questions will be answered in due time," Letha said. "But come with me. A celebration has been prepared."

She sat up straight and made room in the carriage. "Come and sit with me. One of you on each side. Bill, you haven't said a word. Are you

speechless?"

"Very nearly," Bill admitted. He smiled, but somehow deep within him he didn't feel like smiling. A nameless oppression seemed to bear upon him. He could give no reason for it. There was just that sensation of a blanket that seemed to be smothering his thoughts. But even that dwindled and faded as he mounted to the carriage and sat beside Letha. On the other side, Doc took his place and the elfin driver set the unicorns in motion.

Now the elfin flutists took up their melodies again and the flower girls sang a gay song of love and springtime as they walked before the slow procession.

THE DIAPHANOUS veils that Letha wore were of uncertain design and seemed merely draped about her. Whipping slowly in the light breeze, they hid little of her charms and Bill was uncomfortable so near to her. Her perfume mingled with that of the flowers in the gardens and surrounded him with an aura of sensuous delight.

But the intellectual part of Bill's brain, which he felt was being submerged in a flood of sensuousness, was coldly appraising the change in Letha. She appeared the same—but she was not the same girl he had seen in trim space overalls on Earth two weeks ago. She acted as if she had been released from all strain and tension and was perfectly free of inhibitions. As a matter of fact, Bill reflected, he rather felt that way himself. He felt that within this golden city of Paradise he could achieve all that he had ever dreamed of.

Doc's voice penetrated his consciousness. "Give me a little white cottage with a green roof and a garden by the sea, and I'll never set foot on a spaceship again. I've spent a lifetime of rough and tumble on the

starways, but the dream of every star-man is a little cottage in his old age."

This was the first time Bill had ever heard Doc admit he was old. Bill looked sharply at him. Doc's face was utterly relaxed too, as if the strain and tension in the scramble of living in modern civilization had been removed.

Paradise, this city was called—Paradise of Derelict Sea.

Bill wondered.

They were moving slowly along the avenue now. In the distance, forests, gardens, fountains and houses of all descriptions covered the landscape. There was a lake of glorious blue a couple of miles distant.

The variety of architecture astounded Bill. There were tiny cottages nestled in quiet gardens; there were palatial mansions with stately, formal landscapes; there were tremendous structures like ancient feudal castles. All were placed indiscriminately over the whole landscape, yet the entire effect was not displeasing. There was an air of peace and satisfaction that enveloped everything.

Letha pointed towards the golden spires of the great city. "My palace is there," she said. "We shall feast and be entertained in honor of your arrival."

"I don't understand it at all," Bill said. "You are Letha of Earth, but you are Princess Letha of Paradise of Derelict Sea. How did it happen?"

"Doesn't the dream of paradise exist in the lore of every nation of Earth? Not only that, but we find it in the lore of other worlds as well. The ancient Martians dreamed and talked of Paradise—Verheeda, they called it. Is it surprising, then, that such a legend should have a foundation in reality?"

"But paradise has been associated with the concept of life after death."

Letha's glorious laughter tinkled

upon the sparkling air. "I assure you we are not physically dead, but we are dead to the old things of Earth. It is rare for a man to return to Earth from Paradise. Those who do, leave traces of what they have seen in the legends of which you speak. Rather than death, Paradise is the only real life in all the universe. Life, freedom, happiness, the chance to realize every great dream you have ever dreamed is here for you."

Bill felt that there was much she was not telling him; however, as this thought entered his mind it seemed immediately to fade. It occurred to him that there was little use in pursuing the question. Here he was. He had achieved a place in Paradise. Why not be satisfied without further questioning?

But another part of his mind would not put the question down, and suddenly with a cold flood washing over him, he realized that two parts of his brain were warring against each other, and that the questioning part was slowly but surely losing the battle.

**T**HE HOUSES and gardens gave way shortly to the spires and palaces of the golden city itself. Immaculate streets glittered but did not blind with their golden splendor. Life was leisurely. The only vehicles on the streets were carriages drawn by gaily prancing unicorns.

The buildings varied. There were low structures, and some a dozen stories high, topped by reaching spires. There was none of the darkness, noise and filth of an Earth city.

But it was the people moving through the market places that struck Bill most forcibly. Serene and unhurried, they were like true princes and princesses, yet they deferred to Letha with short bows as the carriage passed. Impulsively, Bill felt that he would be truly content to remain here for the

rest of his days.

Of the great public buildings he saw, none was so lavish as the magnificent palace of Princess Letha. The singing flower girls led the way between massive wrought iron gates into a garden of grandeur. The path turned in a semicircle around a blue pool with a fountain of shining water that arced into the sunlight. Then the procession brought up before the palace of glass and gold.

Doc tumbled out on his wooden leg. Bill stepped down rather stiffly and offered Letha his hand. She led them to the carpeted walk that led between wide doors into the great hall of the palace.

Narrow pools lined each side of the walk and glowing fish played in the depths. On the broad lawns on either side were other people, among them at least a score of exquisitely lovely girls, lightly clad as was Letha and surrounded by attendants.

Letha noticed his glance. "They are princesses, too. But don't forget—you are *my* cavalier." There was still laughter in her eyes, but a fierce possessiveness lay behind it that touched off a chill within him.

"How can there be so many princesses?" he said.

"Oh, that does not matter. Anyone who comes here may be a princess if she wishes, but not so many do. When the palace becomes too small for all of us, a new one is built."

"But who runs things around here? You can't all do it."

"Oh, none of us care to be bothered with government and things like that. Can't you guess who is in charge of affairs of the golden city? Mother is."

Bill swallowed to stifle the explosion within him. Mountainous Ma Jergens in charge of Paradise! Then gradually the impulse to laugh at this grotesque incongruity faded as had so

many other impulses since he came.

He said, "She ought to do well. She likes to boss things."

"Oh, she does, and this is—well, Paradise for her, as it is for all of us. It is true when I say that every person may become exactly what he wishes here."

"And you wished to be a princess."

"Always."

THEY CAME into a great hall surmounted by a high glass dome that let in the golden light of the city. The walls were composed of a thousand panels of varihued material. In the center of the hall was a large pool, and surrounding it was the great banquet table. Already the meal was in progress and Bill estimated more than five hundred diners were seated.

"Serving never ceases in the great hall of the princesses," said Letha. "Here we bring those who come in from the ships and who are to be our subjects and fete them with a great feast. In days to come you will learn who all these people are."

"And we are to be *your* subjects?" asked Bill.

Letha smiled a tantalizing, promising smile. "Would you find that so terrible? You don't have to if you don't wish to. In Paradise no one is under compulsion."

Bill felt his mind warring with itself again. He knew he was being utterly ridiculous when he said, "There is nothing I would like better than to devote myself to the service of Princess Letha."

"You shall have the opportunity. But come, our places are waiting."

She led them to the far distant head of the table where three places were waiting in reserve. Her attendants departed then and serving maids approached with the wines.

The wine was excellent, but to his surprise Bill observed that they didn't

bring Doc any. They brought a glass of milk.

"Hey, did you tell them that you never drink wine?" he said.

Doc shook his head. "They must've read my mind. But this is the best milk I've tasted in a long time. Better have some."

"Doc—look, this place is wonderful, but we've got to get—"

The criticism vanished maddeningly from Bill's mind and he turned to answer Letha's sudden question. "What kind of music would you like?" she asked.

"Music—music—" He tried to get his thoughts back to what he was going to say to Doc. But it was gone. "I'd like some of the ancient Victor Herbert songs if they know any."

"Of course. Listen."

Almost instantly, the orchestra broke into the strains of "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life." But never before had Bill heard it played as the ancient melody was being played by these musicians. The exquisite throats of the violins were almost human in their singing tones. Then, as if by prearrangement, Letha and five of the other princesses rose and stood together on the low dais beside the orchestra to sing the words.

*"Ah, sweet mystery of life, at last I've found you—"*

The ancient song of life and love floated out over the assembly. Bill watched their faces intently. There were men and women from every walk of life, officials of states, artists, mechanics, just plain vacationers—universally, their faces were suffused with that satisfaction that fought for mastery—and was attaining it—in Bill's mind. Only a very faint nostalgia for Earth was apparent in the faces of some of them, and when a burst of applause broke the spell, even this dropped away.

The orchestra took up a new strain

now as serving continued. Bill received a dish of golden brown meat that looked like that of some unknown fish. It was boneless and delicious.

The music grew wilder like some frantic Gypsy air of a long distant and almost forgotten Earth. The dancers came forward again and whirled about the circle of the table in an intricate pattern of motion. Their costumes were a whirling mass of color—gold, brown, yellow, green, blue, and red—they spun and darted until the whole room seemed to partake of their motion and became a mad haze of color that was exhausting to the emotions.

Then, abruptly, on a wild, discordant note, the music ended and the dancers stopped.

"That gets you," said Doc. "I feel like I had been out there with them. I'm winded."

"You were out there," said Letha. "Not physically, of course, but you were undergoing every sensation of motion and exhilaration that you might have experienced had you been dancing. That's the essence and wonder of our art here."

"I don't understand," said Bill. "Unless it's a sort of mental control."

"I think that's what it is. Minds are more attuned to each other here. Men understand one another and there is little confusion. All of it is due to better mental harmony than is known outside of Paradise."

"Then there is definitely an unknown power acting upon our minds." Bill got the words out before that blanketing influence closed over his thoughts.

"I don't know," said Letha. "But whatever it is, it is good."

Bill didn't say, "I wonder." The words were clamped in his throat as if a hand had been laid upon him before he could utter them. And through the pain of the repressed words he



sensed a warning, indefinite, intangible, and completely gone within an instant, so that it seemed only a figment of his imagination.

**FINALLY** Letha said, "Shall we leave—or do you want to see more of the show?"

"When does this end?" said Bill.

"Never. The feasting and the entertainment have never been interrupted since the beginning of Paradise. It will go on until the end of time."

Doc said, "Let's not stay until the end."

He grinned at his joke, but Bill's mind struggled mightily as he tried to put double meaning into his words, "No, let's not stay—for the end."

The fairyland carriage was still waiting when they left the palace. They went now without the accompaniment of the flower girls and flutists. Letha said, "I will show you your estates in Paradise. Each of you shall have that which you have always desired."

"Me for the little white cottage by the sea," said Doc. "But I suppose we get shoved in some two by four apartment, proving that Paradise is as 'civilized' as the rest of the universe."

"You'll see," Letha promised.

"I'd like to see your mother," said Bill. "Can that be arranged?"

"I'm sure it can," said Letha. "She will be glad to grant you audience. I'll arrange for it tomorrow."

"Grant us audience—!" Doc spluttered. Then he subsided as if the same forces were at work on his mind as on Bill's.

The carriage moved across the city and back down the avenue, but turned off before they got to the field where the space ships lay. They turned towards the blue lake they had seen before. As they approached, Letha stopped the carriage and stepped down. She motioned towards the

shore.

"For Doc Hodges, for as long as he shall remain in Paradise."

Doc stared, his eyes bulging. By the shore was a small white cottage with a green roof. There were flower gardens and chicken coops.

"It's the way I've always pictured it!" Doc breathed.

"It's a rather easy model to prepare," Letha said. "The dream of every old time spaceman is the same, with only minor changes."

"That's not for me," Bill said. "You've guessed wrong if you think you will settle me in a two-by-four chicken coop like that."

"Oh, no—we've prepared for you, Bill. There are many of your kind, too. Yours is on around the lake."

**DOC WAS** paying absolutely no attention to Bill anymore. He walked slowly and lovingly towards the flagstone walk that went around the house. As he came to the shaded porch overlooking the water he took out his pipe. Then he sat down and put his feet on the rail as if that was to be his spot for the next thousand years.

Bill watched him in bewilderment. The spell of this place had completely overcome Doc. He had forgotten Bill Scott existed.

"Come," said Letha to Bill.

"I think I ought to stay with Doc." He knew he hadn't ought to allow them to be separated, but at the same time he knew he was helpless to prevent it.

"Let's look at your place, anyway," Letha said. She smiled knowingly as if she had absolute knowledge of what Bill was going to do for the rest of his life.

They left Doc without a word and the carriage took them along a narrow road that wound by the shore. Bill soon observed that the opposite

side of the lake was far different from this. High rocky crags reared up from the water and a miniature storm seemed to be bursting with ferocity upon the cliffs. Black thunderheads reared into the sky, and vivid lightning flamed from sky to ground. Instinctively, he thrilled to the display of nature's forces. The sun had set before they left Doc, and swift darkness made a fit setting for the terror of the storm.

"Is this not for you, Bill Scott?" said Letha quietly. She seemed sobered, but not frightened by the storm into which they were coming. "Here are forces of nature, and there are forces of men, too, that you may battle. Is that not what you want? You have sought conflict and adventure on the starways. In Paradise you may do daily battle with the forces of man and nature and when you seek surcease from the struggle there is the golden city—and me."

Bill looked at her dubiously. And then he knew how truly his inner purposes and most secret thoughts had been invaded by the mysterious powers of this place. It was conflict that he had sought all his life, the thrill of conflict on the starways. It had been satisfied during the war by the fierce space battles, but in the days of peace it was hard to satiate that urge. It was this very thing that had led him to defiance of the ban on flight into Derelict Sea.

But this—this was a wholly artificial thing. These crags and this toy storm. It was only a stage setting, mere props.

As if in refutation of his opinion, the storm roared through the sky over them and burst with a painful tide of sound about them. Water flooded from the sky and washed over the gay carriage, drenching the occupants.

Gradually, the road turned away

from the lakeshore and mounted the high crags. Then in the distance, nestling like a dull filling between jagged teeth, Bill spotted a building. It was like a castle in the crags, an ancient feudal castle complete with spires and minarets about which the lightning played with deadly purpose.

"Is that—?" Bill gasped.

"Isn't it lovely?" Letha said. "Here the very fires of Heaven and Hell play and challenge the soul of a man who is brave enough to meet that challenge. The House of Flame is yours."

"A man likes something besides an eternal thunderstorm!"

"Of course—and in the morning you shall see it. There will be the peace and quiet after the storm. And such a sight of the rising sun as you have never before witnessed, when it breaks through the blackness of the night and the clouds and bursts upon the golden city of Paradise. Yes, there is peace and quiet here when you want it. The House is staffed with servants who will serve your every need or will fight to the death for your amusement."

That would hardly be his type of amusement, Bill thought. He viewed the House of Flame with mingled feelings. The ancient castle was forbidding and inhuman, yet Letha was not mistaken. It challenged him—the surroundings, the storm beating about their heads, the harsh landscape.

Yet he felt that he was being played upon somehow by the hands of a skilled and merciless musician—a surgeon musician who was touching the nerves of his body at will, playing a harmony of strange emotions.

But it was only a fleeting thought that was quickly smothered.

The little unicorns halted the carriage at the top of the low rise. Bill looked questioningly at Letha, for the castle was yet high up in the jagged

teeth of the mountain.

"This is as far as we can take you," she said. "You must go the remainder of the way on foot."

Unwillingly, Bill jumped down into inches of mud and water. Thunderheads rolled in the crags and swirled about the turrets of the House of Flame at the top of the hill. This was not Paradise; this was Hell.

"I'll see you again, soon," Letha said.

"The meeting with your mother tomorrow—" Bill reminded her.

"Yes. It will be arranged. Now, take these."

She handed him a pair of Flamers hidden somewhere in the carriage. Bill looked at the weapons with a start, then took the ugly cylinders from her.

"You'll need them on the way up," she said, "and afterwards."

Then she leaped back into the carriage, her thin garments clinging like wet gauze, the rain droplets sparkling in her hair. She gave word to the unicorns and the carriage vanished in the blackness of the night that descended upon them.

**WHILE** lightning cast flares into the heavens and thunder shattered the silence, Bill stood staring through the rain. The wind rocked him and chilled him with its blast.

Paradise, he thought.

Then he considered Doc sitting by his quiet little house by his quiet little lake and his quiet little chickens—and nothing to do. And suddenly he laughed into the storm. Whoever was running this Paradise—and he didn't think for a minute that it was actually Ma Jergens—certainly had his number. Sure, this storm and this mountain crag with its mysterious House of Flame was his meat. And wild animals and unknown dangers on the trail to the castle—he hoped they were there.

This was beauty. This was life—not the pale splendor of the golden city of Paradise.

He turned and began to fight his way up the muddy, rocky trail. It was literally a river bed now with great, tumbled boulders to surmount. Where there were not rocks, there was clinging, sucking mud.

He wished he had a light. Though the sky was intermittently cut by flame, the intervals between left him in blinding darkness through which the forces of nature seemed to strike with new fury.

He left the remains of the old trail and struck out over the rocks. The going was somewhat easier there because the water ran between the crags and the sharp surfaces gave him surer foothold than the slippery mud. He could only move, however, by waiting for lightning flashes, then photographing the scene on his mind and taking a step or two, and waiting for the next flash.

The rain was slackening somewhat, but the rising wind made his steps upon the rocks more precarious. It blew against him in gusts and whistled and whined among the rocks. He paused and tried to look ahead for the silhouette of the House of Flame; but it was invisible behind the overhanging rocks ahead and above him. He felt he must be nearly there, however.

The whistling of the wind was almost a shriek that tore at his senses. It rose and fell in a moaning challenge to his very right to live. It whined through the rocks and spun melodies of hate upon the water laden air.

And then the fierce reality that his mind had refused to believe forced itself upon him. The whines and shrieks that tore the night were not of the wind—it was only a low moan that whipped gently about his ears. But this other sound—the sound of

hate and challenge was the sound of a voice.

As if to punctuate this realization the skies lit suddenly with sheeting flame. The rocks stood out in livid white and their wetness was like slime. Not far away Bill saw the towers of the House of Flame glowing with purple fire.

Then he saw the moving, writhing coils and heard the voice, "I am Master of the House of Flame."

IT WAS not human or anything remotely similar to a human voice. It was a snarl of hate echoing out of some long forgotten tomb. Those great, shiny coils writhed and lashed about, and a head reared up bearing eyes of scarlet fire.

Without thought, by instinct alone, Bill brought up the twin flamers that Letha had given him. His fingers crooked around the familiar controls and blue radiance lit the night.

It touched the great serpent and the smell of burned flesh fumed upward. But the blow was far from fatal. The foot-thick body of the reptile lashed high in the air and crashed to earth. The blow landed within a yard of Bill, displacing boulders that crashed and rolled towards him. He leaped aside, throwing himself into the mud.

That voice came again, "I am Master of the House of Flame."

Bill knew it was the serpent who had spoken. There was no time to consider the evil miracle of this, however. One of the flamers was gone, lost in the mud as he fell. Holding tightly to the remaining one he crouched in the slime behind a rock, waiting for the next lightning flash to disclose the beast.

Then he saw it. The great scaled head was staring directly at him, and Bill rose and screamed back at the monstrous thing, "I am Master of the

House of Flame."

He poured the terrible radiance of the flamer into that face and almost insanely cried his defiance into the night.

The serpent reeled back from the blast and seemed almost to bury itself in the mud. The fearful hiss of its motion between the rocks and through the mud vied with the howl of the wind and the rain. Bill looked desperately ahead, straining in the darkness, blinded by the lightning flashes. Then he realized the reptile was gone. He waited a long time in the darkness for the sound of its coming, expecting the sweep of those great coils to enfold him.

But nothing came. Nothing but the nerve wracking absence of any clue to the serpent's presence.

By now the rain was reduced almost to a drizzle, and the wind had died. The turmoil of clouds in the sky permitted an occasional star to be seen.

Bill moved cautiously from his position. The talking monster serpent seemed like some long forgotten nightmare now, but he felt it still remained to challenge his mastery of the House of Flame. He would have to come back in daylight and search for clues to its presence. If he had struck a fatal blow, the body might be somewhere on the hillside below.

He surmounted the crest of the ridge immediately above him and found himself at last before the House of Flame. Only a narrow, walled courtyard surrounded the castle. Its gate hung dismally open and creaking in the light wind.

No lights appeared within, but the structure seemed intact. Great intricately patterned windows behind heavy iron grills were unbroken. He strode up to the door and lifted the massive knocker. He would have sworn it weighed ten pounds.

The falling knocker sounded hollowly and boomed with the force of a cannon shot into the great building. Almost instantly, the door opened. A solemn, barrel-chested individual, nude to the waist, stood there.

"No one comes to the House of Flame," he intoned.

"The Master comes," Bill Scott said.

"The serpent, and only the serpent, is the Master."

"The serpent is dead."

Weariness was creeping over Bill. He could not recall when he had last slept, but it seemed as if a great draining of his life's energies had taken place. He had to have rest and sleep soon. But the ignorant brute in the doorway was adamant.

"The serpent warned of your coming," he said. "I shall throw you back down the valley from whence you came."

Hidden fires of anger blazed anew within Bill, and he leaped. That was his mistake. The man swung huge logs of arms and enfolded Bill in their grasp. Bill's arms were pinned to his sides, and though his fingers touched the flamer he could not bring it up to do any good.

The arms increased their pressure and the breath was driven from him. His vision grew spotty. The arms tightened.

The arms—

He fought back the blackness in his vision. There were no arms about him—only the thick, slimy coils of the serpent he had seen on the hillside.

Its bloody eyes looked into his, and evil laughter rang in his ears as the life was crushed from him.

He fell to the ground beside the door, the serpent wrapping fold after fold of itself about him.

of the flamer and set off the weapon at his side. His own clothes were impregnated against the effects of the radiance, but at this close range he felt the searing pain of its blast as it glanced against his leg.

The effect on the serpent was more telling, however. A momentary shudder went through the thing as a reflex of pain shot through it. The enormous folds loosened perceptibly.

Bill kept the flamer on despite the pain in his own leg where the glow touched. It was almost directly upon the sensitive spot of his old war wound.

The contest was entirely a question of which of the opponents could endure the most and which was getting the greater effect from the weapon.

The serpent was getting most of it, Bill knew. That was what kept up his own endurance, but if the material of the pants gave way, exposing his flesh to the full force of the radiance it would cost him his leg. That was worth the gambling for now his life was at stake.

The bloody eyes of the serpent were still opposite his own, but in them Bill saw a weakening. They were not so bright, and they rolled as if in pain.

Then the voice of the serpent spoke, and there was indeed pain there, "I am the Master of the House of Flame."

In that instant the terrible coils fell away from Bill. With his remaining energy he twisted over as he spun on the floor and fired the flamer directly at the serpent vanishing through the doorway of the castle.

But it was gone before he could gauge the great speed of its slithering motion.

As he rose, he reflected that if

**G**UIDED by instinct rather than thought, Bill touched the control

this was Paradise he would gladly take its opposite. The light wind was cold on his wet body and a chill shook him. He didn't relish sleeping in the same building with the monster serpent who dogged his trail, but he had no intention either of sleeping out in the mud and rain.

He entered the hall that opened from the doorway. No one was in the spacious place, musty and deserted as a waiting tomb. Bill wondered about Letha's statement that there would be attendants to serve him. Surely the incredible serpent-man could not be one of them.

He was too utterly weary, however, to consider any of the mysteries of his situation. There was far more mystery here than he could fathom now, and his energies seemed to be more greatly depleted than his exertions warranted.

He supposed that sleeping quarters would be on the second floor, so he mounted the huge stairway at the end of the hall, a stairway that once had been a noble structure of stone and precious metals, but which was now dusty and neglected.

A long hall at the top of the stairway was lined with doors, all of them closed. And locked, too, Bill discovered after trying at least a dozen. At last he found one that was open, a massive bedchamber. There was a huge, wide bed and ornate furnishings in the room, with thick carpeting covering the floor and heavy drapes at the windows.

Everywhere was evidence of long disuse. Though the bed was made up it was covered with dust, and as Bill drew back the covers they ripped to shreds. Then he noticed that the carpet was powdering beneath his feet.

In his weariness he concluded that Doc had got by far the best deal out of Paradise. But that was of no im-

portance now. He fell across the bed and slept.

**H**OW LONG he was there he didn't know. But it was not yet light when he was roused by a disturbance within the room. The bed was shaking and a small voice was screaming shrilly.

"Bill Scott! Bill Scott—wake up!"

He roused and blinked, then leaped to his feet in sudden alarm as recollection of his surroundings returned. He recognized no one who could have spoken, then he caught sight of a small glowing light in an elfin hand. It was the tiny driver of the carriage of Princess Letha.

"Wake up!" he screamed excitedly.

"What's the matter?" Bill demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"The Princess Letha is in danger. You failed to slay the serpent. Now they've got her. You must come at once to save her."

"Who? Where?"

"They have taken her to the Flame Pits." The elf darted away towards the door and Bill raced after him. He felt strangely refreshed even though he knew his sleep must have been short.

Somehow Bill felt he understood the implications of the elf's words. Somehow Letha was in danger and she had brought him to the House of Flame to avert that danger. She had called him her cavalier—and until now he had failed to understand the significance of the words. He was not only her subject; he was her guardian from some impending evil.

He was hard put to follow the racing elf with the miniature lantern. The creature led the way to the grand stairway and into the main hall. He fled on to the back part of the castle and there he halted at a wide stone stairway opening into depths below

the castle. As Bill stumbled towards him in the darkness, his guide held the lantern high.

"Down there," he said. "You will find her there, and they already are preparing her for the chains."

"Lead the way!" Bill ordered.

"I cannot. Only the demons who inhabit the place can go there, or those who challenge the demons for mastery of Flame House. This is the way it has always been. Go—and save the Princess Letha!"

Bill knew it was useless to argue with the little creature, its kitten-like face adamant in the glow of the lantern. He snatched the little light and, leaping into the opening, raced down the broad stairway, its steps worn and pitted as if by the feet of thousands through the centuries.

He held the light high to peer into the depths, but though he continued his wild pace downward, the end of that stairway was not yet apparent. On he raced until the opening behind him was lost in the dimness and the figure of the waiting elf a mote that he could no longer see.

Fatigue in his war-wounded leg forced him to slow his pace, and fear began to crawl upward within him as he halted on the stairway to look back. There was nothing there now. Only blackness above and below him, and this stairway like a segment hanging in outer space.

The lantern was almost useless, not illuminating more than a dozen steps, but he held it out and resumed the descent. He must find Letha if she was in this dungeon chamber.

After what seemed another thousand steps, the darkness began to lift and a subtle crimson glow took its place. The stifling odor of smoke was in the atmosphere and Bill recalled the name the elf had used—Flame Pits.

The light was yet too deep in the infra red to permit any accurate vision of his surroundings. It was literally visible heat that assailed his senses.

Descending into the glow was like being lowered into a bath of blood, and the smell of death seemed to rise from the foul pits. The light increased rapidly now into the visible range and he glimpsed far below him a turn in the stairway.

AT LAST he reached that turn and left the steps behind, only to halt before the scene that lay open to his vision. He quailed before its utter fearfulness struck all his senses at once.

The red glow over everything was like the heat of an annealing furnace. It came from pits of molten lava that bubbled and spumed liquid rock into the air. The sulphurous smell was overpowering.

But it was the sounds that came to his ears that assailed his soul; a cacaphony of hideous wailings in unison. He looked toward the sound and saw beyond the pits, a great open plain of sand where hundreds of humans were chained. They writhed grotesquely and from their throats came that unison of agonized chanting.

He swore feverishly. Like Dante's *Inferno*—this *was Inferno*!

Paradise!

Watching the wretches on the sands, he saw moving among them girls like the princesses, who were bringing water and caring for the chained ones, giving them sympathy and attention.

But Letha was nowhere visible. His eyes darted about, searching for verification of the elf's words.

At last he saw her. She was on the far side of the cavern, running wildly, dashing between the pits, slipping perilously close to the molten

lava. Behind her—

Recognition thundered in Bill's brain. It was the serpent-man of the castle, the assailant he had driven off at the door of the House of Flame.

His steps were less lithe than those of the girl. But Bill gasped as Letha paused to look back at the serpent-man, who brandished a spear. She was on the brink of one of the widest of the pits, trapped, unless—

She backed off a few steps, then ran forward and hurled herself through the air. She landed in a heap on the far side, only to begin slipping back as the sand slid into the pit. Wildly she clawed her way up as the flames seemed to touch the flimsy covering that was her only clothing.

As Letha struggled to safety, the serpent-man gave a cry of hate and frustration and seemed on the point of hurling the spear. But apparently he wanted to capture Letha unharmed.

Instead of hurling the spear, he backed off to duplicate Letha's jump. As he hurtled through the air, Bill's flamer caught him in mid-flight. Without a cry, the serpent-man crashed to the edge of the pit and rolled back into the lava. He disappeared as the pool erupted with a fearful, burbling sound.

There was sudden silence in the Flame Pits. Then the chained unfortunates began a new chant, a paen of welcome and joy. Bill, deaf to their words, rushed to where Letha lay in exhaustion on the burning sands.

"Letha! Are you all right?"

He raised her tenderly in his arms and her eyes opened slowly and she smiled up at him.

"Now I am," she said meaningfully.

"I wish you'd tell me sometime what's going on around here!" Bill began to revile the kind of paradise

he had found, but the gate of his thoughts closed again and the words would not come out.

"Don't you see that Paradise is not too different from the world you've known?" said Letha. "There is good and there is evil here, and there is need of men like you to fight against the evil. That is why men whose whole aim in life is adventure and fighting, are brought here. Is that not Paradise for you?"

HE FOUND himself nodding in agreement. She was right. This was Paradise for him. Adventure and conflict—these were the things by which he lived. He felt a surge of exultation as he held Letha there in his arms, knowing he had saved her life. She was watching his face as though she knew his innermost thoughts.

"Of course it's Paradise, Bill Scott—and always at the end of adventure there is—Letha."

It didn't quite ring a bell, but he felt too tired now to make an issue of it. His sleep had been insufficient, he realized, and now that the urgency of his mission was gone, the weariness was creeping back over him.

Carrying Letha, reluctant to let her out of his arms, he started towards the great stairway with its endless steps leading out of the Flame Pits. "I'll get you out of here, and then free these people," he said. "Then you can tell me what it all means."

But as he turned, a voice shouted his name from a dark ledge at the side of the cavern.

"Bill! Throw her into the pool!"

Bill whirled at the sound of his name and Letha struggled in his grasp. She pointed a slender arm at the emerging figure and commanded Bill, "Kill him, Bill. Kill him!"



UNABLE TO comprehend the situation, Bill drew his flamer slowly and watched the advancing figure. It was a man, naked except for shorts. His body was wounded and scarred.

On his head a strange mesh sack that looked as if it were woven of copper wire hid his features. He spoke again. "Don't shoot, Bill! It's me, Greg—"

Greg?

Greg!

The name seemed to roar in his ears and long forgotten memories clamored in his mind for recognition.

Greg. There was once a face that went with that name, but there was no face now. The sack hid it.

No, he knew no one named Greg. Slowly, he lifted the gun and Letha screamed hysterically, "Kill him, Bill. Oh, kill him. Quickly!"

It seemed as if his own mind had dwindled to nothing and he was lifting the weapon automatically, almost impossibly, in the face of a great weariness overwhelming him. When he had the stranger in the sights, he pressed the control.

But the man was not to be disposed of so quickly or easily. He flattened against the sand floor of the cavern as the radiance, black in the red light of the cave, fanned harmlessly over him. Moving with great haste, he crawled and rolled and scrambled across the sands until he reached the spear dropped by the serpent-man.

Bill tried to keep the flamer trained upon him, but his hands seemed too weak to hold it and the control of his muscles could not guide the weapon.

The stranger in the mask leaped to his feet, the spear in his hands. He drew it back and hurled with all his might. The bright shaft hurled

through the air. Bill saw it coming, but his senses registered only dimly and his reflexes were too sluggish to respond. The weapon caught him, piercing the flesh of his thigh with agonizing fire.

Then the fire slowly burned out in his brain and unconsciousness came.

A SHATTERED dream, a lost world. These lay before Bill's slowly recovering senses. Paradise had proved to be a house of broken dreams: That was the first thought to pierce his wearied mind.

He opened his eyes slowly—then recoiled in sudden alarm. He was trapped, bound. He jerked fiercely, and the wound in his leg sent pain smashing through him. But he could move. He wasn't tied, after all. Yet—

His head was in a sack, a sack of copper mesh like that of his assailant. The stranger—!

"Greg!" he cried.

"Bill! Are you all right? That spear in the leg—I'm as sorry about it as I can be. You would have killed me if I'd let you, and there was no other way to get the sack on your head."

Through the mesh, Bill saw the deep concern and pain in Greg's eyes. "Don't worry about that," he said. "I understand."

He looked around, wonderfully free of the controlling force that had guided his thoughts ever since he came to Paradise.

Paradise! He laughed bitterly... and then he remembered Letha. He whirled, eyes scanning the cavern through the mesh. "Where did she go?" he demanded of Greg.

"The girl? Princess Letlia? I don't know. She ran up the stairway as soon as you fell. I should have killed her. I think she is responsible for

this whole mess. That's why I tried to warn you to throw her in a pool of lava, but I knew you wouldn't."

"Ridiculous!" Bill exploded.

"Yes? Then why do you suppose she was eager for you to kill me? When she returns with help, she will want your death as well, because you are free now of their control."

"I don't understand. I'll never believe there is evil in Letha."

His full senses seemed to be returning now and he saw once more the interior of the cavern. The boiling pits of lava, the moaning wretches chained to the burning sands—it was literally Hell.

And where once they had cheered his victory over the serpent-man, the bitter hate of those wretches seemed now turned upon Bill and Greg. They no longer chanted in unison, but the animal sounds from their throats was a continuous roar of hate, and the words, "Kill! Kill!" came through.

Greg said, "We've got to get out of here or those poor devils will be on us. Think you can move on that leg?"

Bill struggled up painfully. Even as he did so, the ministering girls moved among the chained ones and began releasing the bonds. A half dozen of the men were rising and lumbering forward as if in a stupor. Bill raised his flamer threateningly.

"Don't shoot any of the poor devils if you can help it," Greg said. "They're in the same fix you were."

"Then let's get out. Is there any way but up beside the stairway? I don't think I can make the climb."

"There's a long, dangerous passage that leads to the outside world from this cavern. I've made it twice, but cave-ins nearly got me both times."

"We'll risk it," Bill said. "Let's go."

HE TOOK a dozen steps on the leg wounded by the spear. Combined with the weakness imposed by his war wound, he felt it would be impossible for him to walk a hundred feet, but he took one step and then another—and kept on going.

"All right?" Greg asked. He picked up the spear with its bloody point.

"Come on."

The howls of fury increased. Crazy women screamed and tore their hair and shrieked epithets. Bill increased his labored pace. The bedlam was driving him close to madness.

But those who were free of the chains came on, leaping between the lava pools, arms swinging and hoarse shouts bursting from their throats.

Greg retreated slowly, holding the spear leveled. Sweat streamed blindly into his eyes.

"Get back!" he warned. "I'll spear the first man that comes any nearer."

Their crazed expressions gave no sign that they had heard, and they bore onward. Greg was near the edge of one of the pools as the nearest man leaped. He raised the spear instinctively. The man hurled himself upon it, then dropped screaming into the molten rock.

The suddenness and utter futility of his death threw a hush over the madmen. Greg felt a sweeping nausea, then he whirled to Bill. "Into the opening!" he called to Bill. The latter had been forced to drop two of the wretches with the flamer.

"It can't be helped," Greg said sadly. "But we can seal the cavern so they can't follow."

The black tunnel was only a small opening in the side of the large cavern of the Flame Pits. It was narrow, not high enough to stand erect in.

When they had entered, Greg jabbed the spear into the side of the opening and the roof. After a dozen

jabs a huge crack appeared. Greg leaped back, almost knocking Bill to the floor. "Look out! It's coming down."

Falling debris plunged to the floor of the cave with an earthquaking roar and dust spumed into the narrow confines, blinding the two men, sending them into spasms of coughing.

"I hope we didn't catch any more of those poor devils in that," Greg said.

"Are we safe enough for the time being?"

"Yes—for the time being. I don't know how long. Maybe the tunnel can be flooded from the lake. They'll do it if they can. As a matter of fact, they could destroy the whole place, and probably will—if they can't get us any other way. We're a deadly menace to them now."

"Who are you talking about?"

"I say 'they' figuratively. All I know is that Princess Letha seems to be in control. Whether there is someone or something behind her, I don't know. I *do* know, however, that everyone here—except you and me—is under some kind of mental compulsion. Why, how, or what the nature of it is, I haven't the slightest idea. I accidentally stumbled upon the fact that the copper mesh shields the brain from that influence, and ever since then I've been a hunted man. You can see the results."

He indicated the wounds on his body.

**B**ILL NODDED. "I know what you're talking about. I felt it when I first woke in our ship after landing here. It seemed that a blanket was placed about my brain so that I couldn't think the way I wanted to. Any time a thought of doubt or criticism of this place came to mind, or a desire to leave, it was immediately

smothered out. A moment later I couldn't recall the thought."

"Fortunately, I was never under its spell," Greg said. "When the *Empress* was taken over and driven into Derelict Sea, I was experimenting in the machine shop with these head sacks as a means of overcoming space sickness. I was just lucky enough to be wearing one at the time. When the mutiny occurred I felt as if someone or something were trying to scratch its way into my brain, but was being blocked by the mesh. I saw how funny everyone was acting and had enough sense to keep the sack on, since it seemed to protect me.

"The force, or whatever it is, appeared to give up after a while, as if the intelligence behind it supposed that I might take the sack off. When I didn't, however, everyone on board the ship tried to kill me. I managed to get one radio message out before going into hiding. When we landed I went exploring, but was forced to remain hidden—sometimes not too successfully; they're determined to kill me. The food I brought here with me is gone and I haven't found out anything definite yet."

"Have you made any plans?"

"Yes. My idea now is to get back to the landing field and try to get one of the small ships out of here and back to Earth. We can tell them what we know and perhaps a defense, built on the idea of these copper sacks, against this controlling force can be found. I don't know. I'm not an engineer. This can't be a matter of mass delusion; the mesh sacks wouldn't shield that. It's definitely a force outside our minds."

"But what conceivable purpose could it have?" Bill said. "All that happens is that people are brought here and given everything they want—except for these poor devils here.

Or isn't that true? Does it look different to you than it did to me?"

"I don't know how it looked to you. I've not seen much but this hell hole down here. But it's the damndest thing—it seems these people are here because they *want* to be. Those chains can be removed any time they wish, but they literally sit and fry in hell voluntarily."

Bill nodded in the darkness of the tunnel. "It checks," he said slowly. "They would be the hypochondriacs—those who enjoy sickness and sympathy. And they get the attention and sympathy from the girls who, dressed like houris, minister to them."

"I don't get that."

"I was told that this is Paradise because every person may have his deepest desires satisfied. The deepest desire of the hypochondriac is attention, sympathy. So to them this hell is Paradise."

Greg swore softly. "It's fiendish—and what is its purpose?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. It would seem that an intelligence providing this elaborate world in space would be getting something in return for it. But what? What are these men and women giving—or what is being taken from them in return for sharing this Paradise?"

"I don't know," Greg said slowly. "That's what scares me."

THEY HAD been slowly inching their way forward in the darkness while they talked. The conversation helped keep Bill's mind off the pain surging through him. It seemed to him that they had traveled miles, but it was probably no more than a third of a mile, he supposed. At times they were forced to claw their way over fallen masses of debris, hardly daring to breathe lest they bring down new avalanches.

Finally Greg said. "We're near the opening. One more turn should end this."

There was a very faint warning of dawn lighting the opening as they rounded the corner. Nothing suspicious could be seen outside.

They came onto the beach by the lake, cautious and alert, but could see no sign of danger.

"It'll be a long way around the lake on that game leg of yours," Greg said, "and we've got to attend to it as soon as we can to keep the infection down. I think our best bet would be to see if we can knock together a raft and float it across the lake. That would cut our distance by more than half."

"Sounds okay, but there's something else. Do you have any more of these sacks?"

"Two. Why?" Greg indicated a pair of them at his belt.

"Remember Doc Hodges?"

"Sure. What about him?"

"He's my partner in our express business and right now is hibernating in a cottage across the lake. I wonder if we could nail him down and tie one of these sacks on his head."

"We can try."

While Bill stood guard with the flamer, Greg went out to look for material to make a raft. The spot where the tunnel opened on the beach was beneath the high crags that held the House of Flame. The storm had abated completely now and only the last ragged scraps of clouds sped across the sky as if in a hurry to be gone before the sunlight broke upon them.

Greg disappeared up the beach and Bill waited anxiously for his return. Presently he saw a slow movement in the water of the lake and brought up the flamer, eyes trying to pierce the half darkness. Then the moving thing

reached the beach and Greg rose out of the water.

"Can't find a thing except this forked log," he said. "It'll at least be stable. You ride and I'll swim and push."

"You just about got your head blown off, too," Bill said. "Next time we'd better arrange a signal if we get separated."

Greg laughed. "If you can't shoot any better than you did back in the Flame Pits I won't need to worry."

"I've wondered about that," Bill said. "It seemed that this force just took me over completely and I didn't know how to manage my body well enough to shoot. It was as if it didn't trust me to do the job under compulsion but just took over the whole job and botched it."

"Which was fortunate for me. Let's go. I think we can make it this way."

Bill was reluctant to let Greg do all the work, but it seemed the only way he could ever make it back to the landing field with the wounded leg. It was swollen like a football now, and inflammation was creeping into view. He limped down to the edge of the lake and waded out into the cold water.

**T**HE LOG WAS small and his own weight nearly submerged it when Greg shoved it out into the lake and began swimming. Bill held the spear in his lap and kept the flamer ready. Somehow the ease of their escape made him feel uneasy. He felt as if they were being watched and that the unseen enemy was only waiting until the right time to pounce upon them.

Bill estimated it was about two miles across to Doc's cottage. It seemed like an ocean, though Greg was a strong swimmer and was making good progress considering his burden. Satisfied that they were tempo-

rarily out of any obvious danger at least, Bill lay lengthwise, his legs along the forks of the log, and lent the strength of his arms to the swimming. Their speed increased perceptibly.

They were more than halfway across when they first noticed the darkening of the sky and the rise of the wind that sent little choppy waves biting across the surface of the water like cat's teeth.

Greg paused and glanced up. "Looks like more storm. Hope we make it before it breaks like it did last night."

Bill looked at the storm and the rising waves. "Storm! That's it! That's how they hope to lick us. They'll try to keep us from reaching shore again."

He slipped into the water, lashing his weapons to the log with his shirt.

Greg exclaimed, "Don't Bill! That leg of yours is in a dangerous condition. This may make it impossible to save."

"Rather be without my leg than my life," Bill said. "And that's what we'll both be without if we don't make shore before they get this storm whipped up."

"You think it's possible for them to deliberately cause one?"

"I'm sure of it. Look at the way those clouds are forming directly over the lake."

As Greg saw, the storm was centering directly over them. The wind rose with staggering fury and savage whitecaps snarled from the tops of the waves that beat upon them.

One man to each fork of the floating log, they kicked and churned the water with all the force of their bodies. Bill shut his mind against the pain in his leg.

But their progress was slow. "We'll never make it with this log," said Bill. "Let's let it go."

"We might need it to ride out the storm if it gets too bad."

"If we don't make shore the storm will never let up until we're dead. The log will do us no good."

Reluctantly Greg agreed. The log was only slowing them and if Bill could not make it to shore by swimming, he'd have to be towed.

They abandoned the raft, not even bothering to retrieve the weapons. Lashing spray filled the air and made breathing nearly impossible. Bill tried diving deep and swimming under water to save his energy from fighting the waves, but progress was slower that way. It seemed as if fierce currents were being created in the water, to carry them back toward the center of the lake.

Not the least of their difficulties were the mesh sacks. Water filled the tiny openings and blinded and strangled them, but they dared not remove them.

The clouds above were black furies riding the sky. Lightning raced through the ebon masses and rain began to fall.

At last Bill knew that he would never make it. He could see that Greg was holding back to stay with him.

"Go on, Greg," he gasped. "You can make it. Never mind me."

"No— Here, let me give you a hand. Rest a little while and I'll tow. I'm to blame for that leg. I could have been more careful."

"And I would have killed you. Look, Greg, we're less than a quarter of a mile from Doc's place—the little white cottage over there. There's a good chance you'll find a boat on the place, maybe a motor boat. Then use it to pick me up."

Greg looked from him to the still increasing fury of the storm and knew that Bill was right. "All right," he said. "I'll get a boat if I have to

build one. I'll be back."

**B**ILL WATCHED his long, powerful strokes with satisfaction. He would make it in spite of the storm's fury, even though he could never return in time to save his companion. But there was satisfaction in knowing that one person with knowledge of the mystery of Paradise would live to carry word to Earth.

Mere treading of water became more of a task than Bill felt equal to. It would be so easy simply to cease his motions and let the waves have him... forever.

And then he saw a sight that miraculously revived his strength. In the distance Greg was rising from the water and wading shoreward. He had made it. Now, regardless of what happened to Bill Scott, Greg would carry through the work of ending the threat of Paradise of Derelict Sea.

Suddenly Greg started running as if he had seen something, perhaps a boat in the little cove by the house. Abruptly, as he was almost out of Bill's sight around the corner of the building, he seemed to twist in midair and plunge to the ground out of Bill's line of vision.

Almost immediately, Doc Hodges ran out of the cottage towards Greg, a flamer in his hand. As near as Bill could tell he had shot Greg full in the face.

The mystery of Derelict Sea would never be revealed now—unless someone else should stumble on its secret.

It had to be made known, Bill thought grimly. He was now the only man alive who had the answers, so he must live.

Once more he stroked out and faced the current, then realized there was no more need to go towards Doc's cottage. He could not hope to overpower Doc, nor did he have a mesh for Doc's

use.

The current was actually carrying him toward shore at a point where the carriage road lay. He struggled on in that direction, following the path of least resistance as long as possible.

As if seeing its quarry on the verge of escape, the storm whipped new fury down on his head. The screaming of the wind and the roaring of the waves beat a maelstrom of sound about him. Weakness became sheer exhaustion, for he had lost a great deal of blood in the water.

Gradually the current ceased to aid him as he reached a point where it swirled back from shore. Gauging his progress by land marks, he saw that his progress had almost stopped. He could never make it against that current. As long as he went along with it around the lake he had a faint chance of survival—until he grew too weary to remain afloat. But bucking that current was hopeless.

He turned for a last despairing look at the hateful sky. The faces of devils were in the black clouds, and their forked tongues of lightning lashed down at him from evil mouths filled with thunderous laughter.

He wished that he might have seen Letha once more. Princess Letha. He smiled dreamily. She was so lovely as a princess—like a child playing at a game of make-believe. Greg was wrong about her, Bill was sure.

He sank lower into the water and a wave washed a great weight of water over him. He struggled to the surface. One or two more like that—

**H**HE IMAGINED someone was calling his name. Delirious, he told himself.

But it came again. "Bill! Bill—hang on!"

There was the putt putt of a motor and a bull-like voice roared over the

waves: "Swim, damn you—!"

He struggled frantically and turned toward the sounds. A small motor boat sped towards him, rocking perilously on the lashing waves. Standing in it were Greg—and Doc!

Bill knew he was dreaming now, or this was some other bitter illusion of Paradise. But there was no dream about the sudden hands that reached down and dragged him aboard.

"Put him on the cushions," Greg said, "and head for shore. I'll take the flammers."

Doc nodded and took over the helm. Bill noted with flagging vision that both of them had the mesh sacks on their heads. And then he quit thinking about it—and everything else....

Rain lashed down like solid hail, but the entire fury of the storm could not now prevail against the little boat as it neared the shore.

They drove it hard onto the sands and Doc lifted Bill to his shoulders and raced up the beach, Greg following with guarding flammers in each hand. Their goal now was the landing space three quarters of a mile away. As they left the lake area and raced through the gardens and lanes, the sun came out and the storm was gone.

Scores of people were in the gardens enjoying the morning sun. They looked at the running figures plowing recklessly through the flowers and across the gardens in the shortest possible path towards the landing field, but no one made comment or offered opposition.

Doc was puffing hard under his burden. "I—think—we're going to make—it."

"Put me down," Bill said. "I can manage."

"Quit your yammering," Doc said. They neared the field. In a few

minutes they were at the port of the *Mote* and Doc set Bill on his feet. "Just like we left her," said Doc. "Let's get inside where we can piece this thing together and figure out something to do about it."

Nothing had been disturbed, but another ship had landed close to the *Mote* so that its nose was across the prow of the tiny freighter. Doc went out to move the other ship while Greg sterilized and dressed Bill's wound with supplies from the ship's medical kit.

"What I want to know is what happened at the cottage," Bill said. "I thought Doc got you."

"Simple. I heard him coming and fell as he fired. I figure he was being controlled in as incompetent a manner as you were and he probably wouldn't know it if he missed me. So I played possum until he came up where I could jump him. Once I had the sack on his head he was okay."

"You saved my life, Greg..."

"Yes, but I'm going to lose it for you if we don't get that leg cured. Let's get out the sulphalight cabinet."

"But I can't sit in there for a half hour!" Bill protested. "We've got to get moving."

"We don't even know what we're going to do yet, so calm down. Doc's coming and we can talk things over while you're in the cabinet."

**R**ELUCTANTLY, Bill submitted and assisted Greg in setting up the chamber. "What about this sack?" he said. "The light can't get at my head. The copper will shield it completely."

"That's right. I hadn't thought of that. But, look—you can go inside and then take the sack off. You will be entirely enclosed in metal and that should be a better protection than the sack against—well, whatever we're trying to protect ourselves against."

Bill was dubious. He hated to give up the protection of the sack while in this weird Paradise. He remembered only too well the struggle that had gone on in his brain before Greg had forced the sack over his head.

He stepped into the cabinet and turned on the lamps. The faint blue glow filled the tiny chamber with eerie radiance. Bill tried to switch on the normal light and gave a short growl of irritation.

"What's the matter?" Greg said.

"Light's burned out in here."

Only the blue glow, a thousand times as powerful in its germ destroying properties as the ancient sulphalight drugs from which it took its name, illumined him.

"Well, never mind. You can see by the light of the sulphalight lamps. It won't be for long, anyway. Hey—Doc!"

Greg's sudden exclamation of despair rang out through the ship.

"What's the matter?" Bill shouted.

But there was only the sound of Greg's running feet as he leaped out of the *Mote*. Bill snatched up the sack again and fitted it over his head, then threw open the door of the chamber, grasping a towel for a loin cloth. He raced to the port and saw Doc running in the distance, with Greg close behind and loping mightily to overtake him.

Doc's mesh sack was torn and flapping about his neck. With its protection gone, he was once more under the influence of the powers of Paradise.

It appeared hopeless that Greg would catch Doc before he was into the city. Doc was fleet in spite of his age, and Greg had been too late in taking up the chase.

Bill stepped to the controls of the *Mote*. He started the motors and they thundered out a welcome roar. He started the ship rolling gently forward,



passed Greg and went on after Doc. It would be difficult to dislodge him should he get well into the garden area.

He passed Doc, seeing the madness in his eyes, then swung the *Mote* sharply in front of the old man and headed him off. Doc took up a new course, but it was one that enabled Greg to cut corners and shorten the distance between them.

Bill repeated the maneuver. Doc swerved, looking about like a hunted animal. Once more Bill repeated the trick, then Greg nailed Doc.

He leaped on his back and threw him to the ground. Doc clawed and cursed wildly. But Greg's youth held greater strength and kept him pinned to the ground.

Bill hurried out with a length of rope from a locker. Swiftly they tied the frantic man and carried him back to the ship.

"What happened?" Bill asked. "How did his sack get torn?"

"I don't know. All I know is that he suddenly started running over the field like the devil was after him. Then I saw his torn sack and knew why. Unless we can fix it, we'll have to keep him tied until we get out of this."

**DOC STRUGGLED** with renewed frenzy as they lifted him into the port, but his body slid forward on the floor and came to rest near the open sulpha-light cabinet.

Greg helped Bill up the step and said, "Now get into that cabinet and stay there before I have to saw your leg off."

But Bill wasn't listening. He was staring at the eyes of Doc. Doc was lying there sobbing—not with grief, but with joy, and the wild frenzy had gone out of his eyes.

"Thanks, fellows. You'll never know what it was like to feel that

coming over me again. They were slow and quiet about it the first time, but this time I could feel them jumping into my brain and taking over. It was just like they pushed me aside completely and sat down at the controls. It was awful—"

Then he was staring, as was Bill. "The mesh sack! You didn't fix it!" he cried. "I accidentally snagged it in coming out of the ship next door."

Doc's head was still free of the sack, but it lay directly in front of the opening in the sulpha-light cabinet.

"The sulpha-light!" Greg exclaimed. "That's what's doing it."

Bill stepped to the cabinet for an instant and slammed the door. Doc suddenly writhed like a madman. Bill reopened the door.

"Don't do that again!" Doc cried.

"This is it," Greg said. "We can take the sulpha-lights from the other ships around here. The *Empress of Titania* has a big battery of them in two rooms used for precautionary sulpha-light baths."

"We can mount those batteries of lights on the outside of the *Mote*," Bill said.

"The outside?"

"Yes. Then we'll move slowly along the streets of the city and get a large group in the light and lead them back to their own ships. We can't rob the ships of all the lights because they'll be needed for the crews while they pilot their way out of here. But with just a few more hand attacks and the big ones on the front of the *Mote*, we can eventually get them all out."

"That's it!"

Doc said, "How about untying me?"

There was a moment's argument about Bill's going back into the cabinet, but he was finally persuaded and let Doc take his mesh sack. While Bill felt the germs stewing and frying inside him, he repaired the torn

sack and Greg and Doc made a quick job of robbing the *Empress* of the batteries of sulphalights, hooking them in the nose of the *Mote* so that a wide beam of light could be thrown ahead. Then they rigged small hand lights for use in overpowering single individuals.

They were through by the time Bill's session in the cabinet was over. "Let's head for the palace," he said. "We can probably find Letha somewhere there—and Ma, too, probably. As far as is known they are the only ones free to come and go from Paradise as they please. I wish I knew what *that* meant."

"It's obvious," Greg said. "It means they know the secret of this place."

"It *could* mean that," Bill admitted. "I hope it doesn't."

He tried to imagine again where Ma and Letha could fit in this business. It just didn't make sense at all. Ma did not have the ability to create the forces of Paradise. Letha, while intelligent and a skilled engineer, seemed impossible in the role of the great master mind behind this thing. Bill remembered the sweet girlishness of Letha as the Princess of Paradise. Was that only a role of fantastic innocence to hide a deeper purpose of equally fantastic evilness? Bill closed his mind and forced his thoughts away from that direction.

He would know soon enough, for the *Mote* was rolling swiftly down the avenue, far faster than the fairy carriage had traveled. But the *Mote* seemed to be attracting little attention from the people in the gardens. It would seem that space ships taxiing down the avenues of Paradise were a common sight.

THEY DIDN'T want to betray their possession of the sulphalights as a weapon, however, until

they had made an assault on the palace. They rolled up the luxurious drive and halted before the glass and crystal magnificence of the palace of the Princesses of Paradise.

"Swing the ship so the beams cover the main entrance," said Bill. "Then I'm going in there without the sack on my head. I'll take it in my pocket for emergency use. I want you to come behind me, Greg, and cover me. Doc, you guard the ships with both the lights and the flamers. You can expect attack. Let's go."

They switched on the main beams and stepped out into them. Bill removed his mesh sack and pocketed it. He felt no different.

He strode up the broad path between the quiet, shining pools and on into the great hall where the eternal feasting was going on.

THE SCENE was almost the same as when he had first witnessed it. The orchestra was playing soft music and the water players flashed through the indoor pool to the entertainment of the diners.

As he stood there, watching, at the far end of the table one of the princesses rose between her subject guests. Bill's heart bounded with relief as he recognized Letha.

She seemed equally glad to see him. She smiled and he thought her lips formed his name, but she was too far away to be sure. After a moment's hesitation she turned from the table to come towards him. Then she stopped and her expression slowly changed. From sweet innocence it went through all the shades of dark passion to a murderous fury.

"Kill him!" she screamed. A slender white arm pointed towards him in a gesture of murderous fury. "Kill him!"

FOR A MOMENT Bill stood there, stunned by the impact of her vi-

ciousness. He had not even contemplated anything as deadly as this reception.

The music stopped; the diners rose to meet him. On their faces slowly grew the same maniacal fury that filled Letha.

"Come on," he challenged suddenly.

The nearest came on—and walked into the beam pouring through the entrance from the ship outside.

The sudden transformation of their faces was a pitiful thing to see. They stood transfixed while the hate and bitterness washed away, then their faces softened as they realized what had happened to them. Many broke into tears. The ones behind them didn't know what was happening apparently and they continued rising from the table and surging forward into the beam.

As if realizing what was happening, Letha stood out of reach of the beam. Suddenly she cried out, "Stay back! It's a trap!"

Those who had already walked into the beam reached back and began dragging their companions into its radiance. It was the beginning of a fantastic chain that moved slowly towards the *Mote*.

"Keep them in line!" Bill called to Greg. "I'm going after Letha."

With his flamer and the small sulfa-light in hand, Bill put the mesh sack on his head and approached Letha. He felt his appearance must be like that of some demon character out of mythology. He turned on the small light, but its potency at this distance was too weak.

Slowly and carefully, Letha picked up a long knife from the table and drew her arm back. Then, swift as light, she hurled the blade with all her might. Bill dropped to the floor. The knife hissed over him and clattered to the marble floor.

The girl turned and ran. Bill sped

after her as swiftly as his leg would allow. As he ran he heard a tinkle within the hand light that he carried. He glanced at its face. When he dropped to the floor to dodge the knife he had broken the lamp. His only weapon was the flamer—and it was a weapon to kill.

He debated going back for another lamp, but if he left now he might never find Letha in the mazes of this palace. He kept on, racing after her up the narrow stairway beside the musicians' stage.

It turned out to be a long, winding spiral that led to the floor higher than the domed hall on the left wing of the palace.

The stairs seemed to wind endlessly. Bill ran recklessly, then halted with a lurch that sprawled him on the steps. He had almost run into the deadly glow of a flamer spewing death high on the stairway.

It must be in Letha's hands as she waited for him at the head of the stairs. Carefully he estimated the width of the beam and its intensity. He examined the fastenings in the impregnated space garb he had donned in the *Mote*. If it were tight, he could endure a leap through the beam, provided it didn't touch his head.

He decided to gamble it. If he were quick he could be at the top of the stairs before Letha could change her aim. Backing down a few steps, he threw all the force of his body into a lunge that carried him upward, leaping high to keep his head out of range of the lethal beam.

His momentum carried him on to the head of the stairs. Letha was there, crouching on the floor, her eyes burning with hate as he leaped through the beam. He flung his weight against her. It knocked her aside and the flamer spun to the floor, but she scrambled away as nimbly as a cat and raced headlong down the hall.

BILL CURSED his clumsiness. It seemed she literally had slipped between his fingers. One of his hands had closed about her wrist and another about an ankle, but she had broken his grip as easily as if his fingers were threads.

He rose and spotted the doorway into which she had vanished. Both flamers were in his hands now, but they were useless. He could not fire upon her. It would be sure death because ordinary, unprotected clothing was no barrier, and her thin garb was as penetrable as air.

The door burst open at the touch of his shoulder and he plunged into a bedroom.

Luxurious hangings covered the walls of the spacious room. Thick, soft carpeting covered the floor and his feet sank into its depths.

A huge bed that would dwarf anyone as small as Letha stood against the far wall—and Letha was standing beside it.

Twin flamers were in her hands, pointed towards Bill. "The closer you get the quicker you die!" she said grimly.

"Princess Letha," he said softly. "I'm Bill Scott, cavalier of the Princess. You love me, Letha, just as I love you. That's why you can't kill me."

He hoped his words might bring back remembrance of the way she had felt, the things her eyes had revealed when he held her for a moment in the Flame Pits before Greg came upon them. It was in vain. That bitter hate did not leave her face.

"You came to steal my kingdom. For that you must die. The Princess Letha demands loyalty."

"Love includes loyalty and over-shadows all else."

"I know nothing of love. A Princess belongs to her subjects."

Slowly Bill's steps carried him for-

ward. His flamers were trained upon her as were hers upon him. But he knew that he would never fire even if it cost his own life. What he had said was true. He did love her. The part of her that was sweet and innocent—that was wholly alien to the mad harpy threatening him now.

He saw it in her eyes then. She was going to fire. In an instant those twin beams would be spraying over his unprotected skull, burning the life out of him, and Letha, the beautiful, the incredibly evil Princess of Paradise would rule unchallenged.

Then his eyes leaped upward and he jerked the flamers in his hands. Simultaneously he flung himself to the floor. Letha had anticipated this move. The weapons in her hands came down, bathing his torso in flame.

Abruptly the flame was cut off. The tremendous weight of the hangings on the wall behind Letha dropped upon her as the fastenings were burned through by Bill's weapons. The massive folds fell, smothering her under their folds.

Bill gathered her struggling form tight within the folds, binding her arms, and then his hands reached through the thick fabric to wrest the flamers from her.

Both of her weapons were still blazing, burning holes in the drapery. Bill feared she would injure herself in the frenzy of her struggles. He picked up a heavy ornamental statue from the table by the bed and brought it down on her skull.

Letha's struggles ceased instantly. He gently uncovered her from the drapes. Even in unconsciousness her face held the look of fury and evil that had possessed her, and Bill's heart grew heavy within him. Was this the real Letha? Was the innocent Princess only an assumed character to deceive him?

He lifted her tenderly, passed

through the doorway and on down the stairs. He entered the banquet hall, now emptied.

GREG SAW him coming. "Bill! I thought you'd got lost. We've got to get these people to their ships. We've rounded up more than we can keep in the beam now, and more are coming in!"

Then he saw the figure in Bill's arms. "She isn't—?"

"No. I had to hit her on the head. She'll be all right—I hope. It's just that I'm afraid she's—oh, hell, I don't know. Put her under the light and bring her to, will you? I'm afraid to watch."

"You think she's really behind this?"

"I don't know—I don't know what to think any more. Take her."

"You should be there. Perhaps your fears won't be realized. I saw you in nearly the same condition once, don't forget. You tried to kill me."

"All right," Bill said wearily. He carried her into the *Mote* and placed her on one of the narrow bunks. While Greg applied restoratives, Bill rigged a sulpha-light over her.

Almost instantly, the drawn tension in Letha's face began to disappear. The lines of hate that had been frozen about her eyes vanished. She became once again Princess Letha, the girl that Bill had fallen in love with.

He breathed her name softly, "Letha."

Her eyes opened. She looked about in a moment's wild fright, then she recognized him—and seemed to remember. Her arms came up and her hands clutched at him frantically. "Oh, Bill—Bill! Don't leave me. Don't let them get me again. It's horrible, Bill. Don't leave me!"

"I'm not leaving—ever," he said softly. "Rest now and you can tell me about it later."

"No! There's mother. You've got to get her."

"We will. Don't worry."

"Right," Greg said. "Look who's coming."

Bill turned. Through the open port he could see Doc Hodges marching towards the ship. In front of him was an immense form with short massive legs that were like wobbling tops moving towards the *Mote*. It was Ma Jergens, dressed mannishly in a slack suit of some coarse weave.

She whirled on Doc as she came to the opening. "Give me a hand at least, you—"

Doc hoisted her with a shove that sent her sprawling. She got up and turned on him. "Why, you—!"

"Keep moving, Fatty! It's about time you learned who's boss around here. I don't want any more of your lip."

Ma's eyes lighted as she saw Letha on the bunk. "Darling! You're safe. You got away from them, too." Then suddenly her eyes misted and she turned to Doc. Her arms went around him and she was sobbing on his shoulder. "Take me home," was all she said.

Doc's arms slowly came up in an attempt to enfold her. "Sure, Ma. Sure. I'll take you home."

GREG PASSED a hand over his brow. "Well, I'll be damned. Now I've seen everything!"

Letha rose to a sitting position and took Bill's hand. She smiled happily. "This is the best day of my life! How I've hoped they would get together someday."

"I don't understand," Bill said.

"Didn't Doc ever tell you? He's my father. He left us long ago because Ma insisted on running things her way and wanted a life of adventure, while Doc thought he was the one that ought to have the adventure. I think

they've both had enough now and will be willing to settle for a little chicken farm."

Doc disentangled himself. "Not on your life, daughter! I thought I'd go nuts that one day I spent sitting on a porch by the lake doing nothing. The best part of the whole deal was when Greg came along and tricked me into thinking I'd shot him. I knew then that it was action that I wanted and that's what I'm going to get. I'm going to get at the bottom of this phony Paradise of yours if it takes the rest of my life."

"It won't take that long," Ma said. "It's all my fault—you've got to do for the rest of these people what you did for us."

"How is it your fault?" Bill demanded. "What is the power that controls people here?"

Ma stared in dejection out over the golden city. "They came and took me up on a hill and showed me all the gold and lands in the universe and said it could all be mine if I would follow them. I did—and this horrible place is the result."

"Who are you talking about? Who made such a bargain with you?"

"*They*. What shall I call them? Parasites? I guess that's what they are. For eons they have lived in space, dormant in that cold and vacuum. At times some of them have found haven on the planets, but they have always been driven off somehow.

"These life forms that can exist in space require a human being or similar high life form in order to make them active. They are just like the parasite worms and animals of Earth. They are about as big as a baseball, small white things like garden slugs. When they find a human being or equally high form of life, they fasten themselves to the back of the skull and dig into the nerve roots of the brain. There they live, gaining sustenance

from their host and eventually causing death.

"In order to have a society of their own they construct artificial societies for humans to live in. They constructed this Paradise so that every person could have his most fundamental desires fulfilled without effort so that those who came would live here in satisfaction and happiness and not desire to leave. Few ever desire to leave and when such thoughts come the slugs quickly crush them through their powers of mind control."

"I'll say they do!" said Bill grimly. "But why can't we see them?"

"I don't know whether they are actually invisible or if they just have the power to control us sufficiently to keep them from being seen. Anyway, I saw one just once. It showed itself to me.

"The mind control I mentioned is practiced only in emergencies, however. They get better nourishment from us when we are free. And generally, such control is not necessary. Take me, the parasites knew what I was from delving into my brain. They knew I was a money grabbing, evil old woman who would sell her soul to the devil for a gold coin."

"Mother—!" Letha cried.

"It's true. You and Doc know it is, and so does everyone else that ever had anything to do with me. But that doesn't mean I'm always going to be that way. I've seen the suffering I've caused and I mean to make up for it."

THERE were tears of genuine grief in Ma Jergens' eyes. Bill believed her. "But what did the parasites require of you?" he said.

"Well, at first they had to have a few people to start on. They made themselves known to me in space and gave their promise. I brought a few people out here and that enabled more of the parasites to be activated. This

in turn enabled them to begin the construction of this Paradise out here."

"What is it? How is it built?" said Greg.

"Out of the stuff of our minds and the forces wasting away in space. All of it is unreal. It is all nothing but the gathering of intangible forces that are held together by the mental power of the parasites. If they should cease to hold it together it would collapse like a bubble.

"Anyway, I had to bring a few people here so the parasites could get started. It snowballed after that. They gained enough power to capture space ships; my real value was ended, but they gave me the job of bossing the place—as long as I didn't interfere with their plans. That was *my* Paradise. That—and all the wealth I wanted. But, like Doc, I had enough. From now on, I'm taking orders instead of giving them."

"So the parasites gave you permission to keep going back after more recruits?" Bill said.

"I don't think they could take it away. Anyway, that was one means I had of getting money—promising old men life in Utopia with fair maidens to wait on them. There were plenty of customers. Actually, the parasites could give the appearance of halting age, but it was an illusion, too. Death is brought on by them in half the normal life span. I think that is why they came out here. They have set up the same Paradise on Earth and other planets, but have been forced out."

"I should think there would be some evidence if they have been on Earth," Bill said.

"Don't you think there is? Where do all the legends of Paradise and Heaven and Hell come from? This scenery is so old it's about worn out. They've used exactly the same thing since the beginning. The Flame Pit

you saw was the Inferno Dante saw and wrote about. How he got out, I don't know, but others have apparently slipped from the clutches of them in times past.

"Take the legend of Orpheus who went down to the pits of Hell to rescue his wife, Euridyce. You just reenacted that old story yourself, with modifications. The modification being that Letha wasn't your wife, but I hope she will be. That wench of mine needs to be tamed before she grows into a wicked old harpy like her mother."

"No danger," Doc said.

"That business in the Flame Pits puzzles me," Bill said. "What were you doing down there, Letha. Didn't you have power to escape?"

"Of course. It was all part of the great illusion. But it was part of my Paradise, too." She blushed suddenly. "You see, the parasites read in my mind a deep desire to be a beautiful princess and be rescued from a horrible fate by my Prince Charming. In your mind they read a desire to be a Prince Charming and rescue fair maidens. So—they killed two birds with one stone."

Bill nodded sheepishly. "Those devils certainly get a man's number. But how about when I tried to kill Bill, and you tried to kill me?"

"The parasites took over control then," Ma Jergens said. "But they were clumsy, and as you saw they failed to control your body very well."

"Well, that about sums it up," Bill said. "The problem now is to get these people to their own ships and find a way to kill off the parasites."

Ma Jergens shook her head. "I think there is nothing that will kill them. Once the last human is freed from their clutches, however, they will all go back to limbo and dormancy. Perhaps in the interim before they find another means of gaining power

we can find some way to block their rise. Apparently, the ancients did it because the parasites abandoned numerous paradises on Earth. Maybe the secret lies in the ancient conflict between white and black magic. I don't know."

THEY GAVE up the discussion then. Bill directed the ship to be turned about so that the group outside could be led back to their own vessel while staying in range of the sulphalights which had power to drive away the parasites, just as the copper mesh sacks had power to drive them from their place at the base of a person's skull.

The crew of the *Mote* disposed of that group and returned to round up another. A third and fourth time this was repeated. Then the crews of other ships were able to help by rigging sulphalights on their own vessels.

Gradually, the city's inhabitants thinned. Then, as the *Mote* was driving down the avenue in a search for stragglers, there was a sudden, high, deafening note that rang out and knifed through the city. Ahead of the *Mote* the great, golden towers of the city shattered with a sound like the collapse of a great bell.

"Paradise is collapsing!" Ma Jergens cried. "We've driven enough of the parasites back to dormancy so that the remaining ones can no longer support the city. In a moment there will be nothing here."

"There are still hundreds of people we haven't found," Bill said. "We've got to step it up! Come on."

He drove the *Mote* into the dying city. Those who came within range of the beam he called to flee to the safety of the ship.

It appeared the parasites were admitting defeat now and deliberately releasing the humans and destroying the city to cause their deaths.

"The Princesses—can't we make one more trip to the palace?" begged Letha.

"We can try," Bill said. They were not far from the magnificent structure. Already they could see huge cracks in its mighty walls. The *Mote* drove up the path to the main entrance and crashed its way into the main hall. Even as they did so, the crew saw a score of the lovely princesses huddled together in terror at the far end.

"This way!" Letha stepped to the port and called to them.

The girls raced towards the ship. The great dome of the hall gave an ominous crack of thunder. Pieces of the shattered structure crashed, narrowly missing the girls.

Bill jumped out, followed by Greg. Doc kept the hand lamp trained on the girls, but it seemed unnecessary. The parasites had abandoned them.

They reached the *Mote* and Bill and Greg shoved them roughly into the port. Inside, Letha and Ma helped them more gently, until the last was in.

"Are there others?" Letha asked.

One of the sobbing girls nodded. "About a dozen of them went to the roof garden when the city began to fall."

Bill surveyed the scene of destruction. "We might have a chance—"

Greg shoved him off balance into the *Mote* and closed the opening. "It's hell to have to leave any of them," he said. "But we've done all that's humanly possible. Can't you tell the air is vanishing out there?"

Saddened, Bill realized this was the truth. Even as he protested, a great chunk of the dome crashed upon the *Mote*, and the distant wall at the end of the banquet hall slowly caved in with a crash of thunder.

Suddenly below them great black caverns appeared, opening to infinity



in the floor of the palace hall. It was interstellar blackness into which they were gazing.

"It's gone," said Ma Jergens.

The occupants rushed to the ports for a look at the death of the golden city. The great black patches were eating through it like a monstrous disease. Then the golden light outside vanished. In the sudden starlight a few drifting fragments of Paradise floated an instant then melted like colored ice in a glass of liquid.

The *Mote* floated in the emptiness of space.

About them were the scores of other ships that had found their way into Derelict Sea. Lights came on in those hulls, and as if by common consent, they turned for Earth, led by the mighty *Empress of Titania*.

In every ship was sorrow for those who had died in the holocaust, but there was gladness, too, for their own deliverance from the menace of the parasites. And there was a fearful task burdening those who knew the secret of Derelict Sea. Somehow, space

would have to be permanently freed of the menace of the parasites.

Clad now in more decorous garments, Letha sat beside Bill in the pilot's seat. It was crowded, but he didn't mind a bit.

"I'm glad I found out what your innermost desires are," she said.

"Why?"

"I'll take care that you have excitement and adventure for the rest of your life. Marriage with me won't be tame, I promise."

"What do I have to do? Rescue my fairy princess from some predicament once a week?"

"Twice."

"There's only one thing I want you to keep in mind," he said.

"What's that?"

He glanced back where Ma Jergens was shaking a finger in Doc's face. Doc was sputtering so fast his plates were slipping.

"Don't forget who's boss," Bill said.

THE END

## DEVIL ON THE MOON

AN

"AMAZING"

VIGNETTE

DANE BRADSHAW knelt awkwardly to examine the specimen. He switched off the electric torch and flipped on the small ultra-violet lamp. The mineral did not fluoresce. He switched the lamp back on and examined the walls of the cavern. It was a funny feeling to be twenty miles from your rocket, isolated in this peculiar Lunar cave and naturally out of radio contact with Hal. He tried to radio just to make sure. The Lunar terrain blanked it as effectively as Earth, even though it was of less dense pumice.

He turned to stride the thirty feet to the cave's opening. He stopped abruptly.

Framed in the cavern's mouth was something! For a bare instant the cold hand of fright seized at his spine, but he recovered himself and surveyed it calmly. And just as calmly the thing seemed to hover there surveying him as well. It was roughly five feet in diameter effectively blocking his exit. It was nothing physical but appeared instead as a shimmering blue

halo, translucent and radiant but with more ultra-violet than visible light. At its core was a denser pulling glow which winked at a regular rate. Dane got the impression of tremendous latent energies.

Looking at the thing objectively, Dane tried to rationalize. I'm looking at something living, he told himself. This is a Selenite. There is a life-form on the Moon though we've never imagined anything like this! Evidently life doesn't always take the carbonaceous form throughout the universe. That's going to bust wide open some pet theories.

What to do? He wanted to leave the cave. His oxygen was running out and he knew he'd have to move soon. He walked toward the creature. It made no move. He walked quite close to it. It remained still, only the pulsing of its core showing its life.

He made some meaningless gestures with his arms. The creature ignored them. He picked up a small chunk of loose pum-

ice and very gently arced at the Thing's base. It moved back a little, then quickly forward.

I'm afraid to touch it, he thought. Suppose it's dangerous—and it looks like it might be. What then? Hal couldn't get to me in time if anything happened. He flipped another piece of pumice toward the Selenite. It struck the web of electric fire and vanished in a coruscant flame, literally vaporized.

Then it moved slowly toward Dane, menace in its slow approach; Dane sensed its purpose. This was enmity!

Frantically he looked for a weapon. He'd taken no hand-gun. There was no life on the Moon it said here. And a hand-gun wouldn't have served against this non-entity. As the Thing moved slowly toward him, his mind raced madly. With lightning-like speed he unwound the coil of thin wire rope from his waist. Snaking it into loose folds, he prepared to throw it

—it was just a hunch.

He flung it straight at the lambent creature. When it struck, a shower of vaporized metal sprayed through the air and the creature's energies discharged. The wire, some of it touching the ground, contacted the Selenite—and not only the metal disappeared. In an instant the Thing had vanished.

Dane dashed for the entrance. Rapidly he spoke into the phone of the transmitter. "Hal!" he said, "I've just short-circuited me a Selenite! There are living, electrical creatures on the Moon! Brother I'm returning right away to the ship."

"Are you all right, Dane?" Hal asked. "There was a blast of static that nearly knocked the receiver dead. Get back here in a hurry."

"I really short-circuited him—or it—right smack to the ground. He fried like a burnt out fuse...!"

—George Lasher

**You've got...**

## NO KICK COMING!

by  
**TOM  
LYNCH**

**T**HERE is quite a close relationship between a rocket and gun—both throw out quantities of matter—and both exhibit the effect of Newton's Third Law of Motion which says that every force is balanced by an equal and oppositely directed force. But in one case, that of the rocket, this "recoil" force is the desired one. In the case of the gun, this recoil force is not wanted at all. Anyone who has ever fired any kind of a gun from an air rifle to a shotgun knows about the recoil force. When the projectile goes out at high speeds the gun must go backwards. In a rocket, this is fine because it is the very driving principle of that machine, but in a gun it's just a nuisance.

Consequently, men who design guns, especially artillery pieces, spend a great deal of time in figuring out ways to neutralize this recoil force. Mostly they use heavy guns, huge shock absorbers and various spring devices. All of these things add to the weight of the weapon and cut down on its mobility. Yet there is a crying need for easily portable artillery pieces suitable for knocking out tanks and armored vehicles. The bazooka which is nothing but a rocket projector suffers from an inherent lack of accuracy. It is not good enough to supplant the artillery piece, for this purpose. How then, can you neutralize the recoil effect in say a three inch gun and still have it portable?

The answer has proved to be simple and effective. In the breech of the gun you put holes which turn some of the expanding gases toward the rear. These expanding gases act just like an inverse rocket neutralizing the recoil effect of the weapon

and permitting the gun to be little more than a tube for directing the shell. And as the Korean War has testified, the recoilless "rifles" (as they're called) do a good job.

Naturally you don't get something for nothing. Because the breech is not airtight, some of the propelling force is lost in neutralizing the recoil and the range and power of the gun are cut down. But these sacrifices are well worth the portability of the weapon because two men can carry a three inch gun and frequently they can mount a five inch gun on a Jeep!

The success of the recoilless rifles and artillery pieces along with the various rocket projectors and bazookas that have been developed point out the nature of a future war's weapons. Mobility and lightness are essentials—troops of the future will carry their artillery on their backs—without strain! One man will operate a five inch gun, accurate at ranges of five miles and capable of knocking out anything. In the battle between the tank and the infantryman, the future looks rosier for the foot-slogger than it does for the sardine sealed in armor. The battlefields and laboratories—what a strange juxtaposition!—are already delivering the weapons for future warfare, and, fortunately, they're weapons suitable for the "little man"—weapons which almost any machine shop can make.

Orwell's "1984" need never come true so long as the armorers are thinking in terms of the individual—one man is better than a tank when he's equipped with a bazooka or a recoilless rifle...

# THE FEATHERED WEAPON

*By Chester S. Geier*



Like was through with trying to frighten them; now he was firing with one purpose—to kill!

**Why this wave of suicides among Earth's officials? Was it a matter of madness — or were the Venusians giving us the bird?**

**T**HE LUXURIOUS hall on the ninety-third floor of the World Capital Building was silent and empty as Lake sprinted in frantic haste down its deeply carpeted length. He had only seconds—a few precious seconds—to keep a man from dying. Awareness of how little time he had

made him drive his long legs to even greater effort, his wide, normally humorous mouth twisted in a grimace of strain.

Doors flashed past, and then he found the one he was seeking. In dignified gold letters it bore the legend: Department of Interplanetary Affairs.



Lake checked his speed only long enough to tear the door open. He burst into 'a dim-lit outer office, with rows of desks behind a long metal railing. Beyond the desks were a number of doors to private offices, and Lake rushed toward one of these. The lettering on the door read: Hobart Pownall, Assistant Secretary.

The door was locked.

Lake swore, backed away, and threw his shoulder against the panel in a hard lunge. The door was of hollow construction, light yet strong, but its lock had not been made to resist the assaults of determined young giants with muscular shoulders and copper-red hair. With a snapping of metal, the door burst open, and Lake went reeling into a spacious office furnished with quiet elegance.

Hobart Pownall stood poised half in and half out of one of the broad window sections that ran along an entire wall of the office. He was a slender man with youthful features and waving hair heavily powdered with gray at the temples. His eyes, peering startledly at Lake across the distance between them, were quite mad.

"Pownall—don't!" Lake gasped. "In the name of reason—"

But Pownall clearly was beyond reason. His features twisted into a leering mask. He laughed—a wild, shrill laugh—and began drawing his other leg through the open window section.

There was madness in the room. Lake felt it. It was almost like a mist, a half-tangible quality that yet was somehow purely emotional. It was an evil miasma that reached through flesh and bone, that grated at mind and nerves and made them vibrate in the cacaphonic rhythms of insanity.

It stopped Lake for an instant. Then he forced his perceptions back to the man across from him. Seeing what was about to take place, he dart-

ed forward in a burst of panic.

Pownall was equally fast. He was pushing himself out and away as Lake came up. Only one foot, from the ankle down, remained in the room.

**L**AKE BRIDGED the gap in a last desperate lunge, caught hold of the other's trouser cuff. But Pownall's outward surge proved powerful enough to snap the bit of cloth from Lake's fingers. Trailing a last wild laugh, he rapidly dwindled as he began his long, horrible fall into the evening darkness.

Lake clutched at the window frame with his other hand, barely in time to keep himself from following Pownall into the abyss. He stared downward with sick eyes, knowing with a terrible clarity how the plunge would end. The nearest terrace of the building was some thirty stories below.

Shuddering, he turned back into the room. "Three!" he whispered. "That makes three!"

The office had a deathly stillness, almost ominous. Dimly, Lake realized that the queer mad sensation he had felt was gone. He felt hollow, drained.

He explored his pockets, found his package of self-lighting cigarettes, and puffed one into flame. A bright flutter of movement caught his eyes. It came from a large, ornate cage that stood at one end of a line of micro-file cabinets. Within the cage was a bird-like creature of almost incredible beauty. It had a large, owl-like head and was colored as vividly as an Earthly macaw or bird of paradise. But its feathers were silkenly fine and iridescent, glowing with a gorgeous depth and richness never attained by any bird of Earth.

A *zirrit*, Lake knew, a Venusian bird-creature that was not quite a bird. Outwardly it looked like a bird, but there the resemblance ended.

There appeared to be something wrong with the *zirrit*. Its movements in the cage were sluggish and listless. Lake shook his head, recalling that the creatures didn't last long under Earth's alien conditions of atmosphere and climate. There was something callous behind the good-will gesture of the Venusian diplomats who had presented the *zirrits* to United Earth's high-ranking government officials.

In another moment, as his thoughts returned to the tragedy that had just taken place, he forgot the *zirrit*. It was after working hours, but he knew that numerous others were present in the building. There was every likelihood that Pownall's fall had already been noticed. And an alarm would be given.

Lake started toward the door, his features drawn with sudden, new tension. It would be highly inconvenient, if not actually disastrous, to be discovered on the scene of Pownall's suicidal plunge. His presence would be difficult to explain.

AS HE HURRIED across the outer office, a bell rang stridently in the building. He checked himself for an instant, a chill of dismay sweeping him. Then, with desperate haste, he roused into motion again. If he could reach the elevators before—

A figure erupted from the door to the hall, and Lake caught at a pair of slender shoulders in time to prevent a collision. He found himself staring into the alarmed features of Claire Vernon.

"Matt!" she gasped in recognition. "The bell! What's happened?"

Lake expelled his breath in a resigned sigh. "Something bad, Claire. Get yourself ready for a shock." He paused, seeing her gaze widen on his face. "It's Pownall. He just jumped out of his office window. I tried to

stop him—tried my best, Claire—but I didn't get to him in time."

She made a soft, horrified sound and raised the back of one slim hand to her lips. Her wide hazel eyes mirrored a curious change of expression. Their shock and horror drained. They became abruptly, nakedly accusing.

The accusation stung Lake. His quarrel with Claire several days ago was still painfully fresh in his mind. It had begun over Pownall's attentions to Claire, with the girl protesting that as Pownall's personal secretary she could hardly avoid his advances. Lake had threatened to take the matter up with Pownall, which he knew would have meant the loss of his position as a minor official in the Department of Interplanetary Affairs, a position already hanging by a thread.

One word characteristically had led to another, and their argument had shifted to Lake's publicly voiced suspicions that the Venusian representatives were responsible for the puzzling epidemic of tension and fear spreading through the top levels of the United Earth government; an epidemic that had resulted in two suicides—three now, including Pownall.

LAKE HAD singled out the Venusian ambassador, Khawtapa Ak-Gornn, as the chief culprit and had urged an investigation. He was certain the Venusians had developed a secret weapon of some sort and were using this to undermine Earth's government structure. As an agent with the Venus Development Commission, he had spent three years among Venusians; and during that time he had learned that the priestly ruling class had ambitions on an interplanetary scale. But in United Earth, the religious heirarchy faced a virtual monopoly—a barrier around which they

could find no detour. The only solution lay in dealing with an Earth composed of individual, rival governments. By playing one government against another, it would then be possible for the rulers of Venus to win strategic interplanetary concessions.

They were craftily aware that Earth's world organization was still new, still weak at the seams. Within many of the countries that made up the union, existed strong nationalistic opposition, with an eye to the opportunities for greater wealth and power that lay in undivided control of the planets. This opposition was already chipping away at the foundations of United Earth, and any weakening from within would complete the process of destruction. And with the various nations freed of restraints, the wild rush for territories and resources was certain to end in a series of atomic wars that would throw the race of man back down the ladder of progress. The Venusians, playing a waiting game, would emerge as the real victors.

Frederick Keith, the Secretary of Interplanetary Affairs, had refused to consider Lake's claims, warning him to cease his efforts or face the loss of his job. Lake knew his carefully erected case had broken down over one point—the identity of the weapon being used by the Venusians. A secret weapon seemed the only answer to the suicidal panic affecting United Earth's highest administrative level, but Lake had no idea of what this could possibly be.

Keith had pointed out that the Venusians knew no more of science and technology than they had been able to learn during the thirty years of their contact with Earth. It was ridiculous, he had insisted, that they had been able to progress so far within that relatively short time as to pro-

duce a weapon so ingenious as to defy both detection and explanation. Finally—and on this positive note Keith had ended the interview—the Venusians were incapable of harm.

**T**HAT BELIEF, Lake realized, was his most serious obstacle. The Venusians appeared harmless enough if one looked no further than their diminutive size, their humility and ceremonial politeness. And the great majority of people looked no further than that. They considered the Venusians "cute" and "quaint" and felt they had an uncontested right to be paternal. For it was their own race, pioneering in space flight, that had discovered the existence of the Venusians. And it was their own race that with characteristic generosity and missionary zeal had given the Venusians their start along the road to modern civilization.

Nothing had been too good for the "dear little Venusians". And in thirty years the situation had not changed. From the experience gained in his work with the Venus Development Commission, Lake knew that the Venusians—or at least the ruling class, which alone had enjoyed contact with Earth—were hypocritical and predatory. But most people didn't know—or weren't willing to find out. Keith was one of these, Claire another. Lake had lost count of the quarrels that had resulted from his efforts to shake her out of the belief that the Venusians were cute, harmless little children of another world.

Those quarrels. Lake sensed that Claire was thinking about them now. And about his anger over Pownall's attentions. She would be thinking of all this in the discordant, unnatural rhythms that seemed to have affected all the thinking of those connected with the government of United Earth.

And her conclusion—

She moved suddenly. She caught at his arms, her hazel eyes imploring. "Matt—you didn't do it? You didn't kill Pownall?"

"Good Lord, no!" he said. "You've got to believe me, Claire. Pownall jumped out of his office window. If I'd got here a second or two sooner, I might have saved him."

She continued to search his face. "But how does it happen that you're here... just when—"

"It was a hunch," he said. "A crazy hunch. I saw that Pownall was nervous and distracted all day. Something was wrong with him. You must have noticed it, Claire."

"Yes," she said slowly. "He had some important papers that were supposed to go out today. He worked on them all afternoon, but he didn't seem to get anywhere. At closing time he told me he intended to finish them tonight and asked if I minded returning to help him."

"I didn't know that," Lake went on. "But I knew Pownall intended to work tonight. And I had the idea that whatever was wrong with him was coming to a head. Alone here, he'd have the opportunity for anything. It bothered me. So I called him up on the visiphone."

**L**AKE TOOK a deep breath. "Claire

—I tell you he was completely out of his head! He... he laughed at me. He told me I was jealous of him—because of you—and that I was checking up on him. He said it wouldn't do me any good—because he was going to jump out of a window to fix me! I was at a restaurant not far from here, where I'd had supper. I came here as fast as I possibly could. But I was too late."

She hesitated in indecision, her lower lip caught between her teeth and a faint pucker between her straight dark brows. The last echoes of the

bell were dying out in the hall beyond.

Lake touched her shoulder urgently. "Claire, we'd better leave. There'll be people here any minute now."

She stiffened. "But, Matt, we can't just run away! It... it wouldn't be right."

"I know," he said desperately. "But we can't do any good by staying here. It won't bring Pownall back. I need time to work this out, Claire. If you suspect me, so will everybody else. I couldn't hope to accomplish anything if I were put in detention or watched every second."

"But what in the world could you possibly do?"

"The Venusians have something, Claire. I'm more convinced of that now than ever. And I'm going to find out what it is!"

Her face cleared. "All right. I don't know if we can get away with it. But if it will give you a chance—"

"Good girl! Let's go!"

Holding her arm, Lake hurried out into the hall. Its imposing length seemed interminable now. His eyes kept shifting to the light signal tubes above the doors of the elevator bank. He had no intention of using one of the automatic cars for their descent. The fire stairway beyond the elevators would be the best means of avoiding discovery.

The elevators were behind them and the stairway just ahead, when Lake saw that one of the signal tubes had finally lighted. A car had reached their floor.

"Hurry!" he whispered to Claire. "We can still make it."

They reached the stairway just as the elevator doors opened and a group of men began emptying into the hall. But in the next instant they found their path blocked by a uniformed guard, who was ascending swiftly toward them. The guard stopped short,



lifting the gun in his hand.

"I had an idea somebody might try using these stairs!" he said.

LAKE SAT in a chair in one corner of the outer office of the Department of Interplanetary Affairs. The floor around his feet was littered with cigarette stubs and his copper-red hair was rumpled.

Claire sat in another chair a few feet away, her small face drawn and pale with the strain of waiting. Lake had hoped to discuss a line of defense with her, but they hadn't been left alone for a moment since their discovery.

An alert-faced agent of the Earth Bureau of Investigation leaned against a nearby desk, maintaining his vigil with stolid patience. The agent made no secret of the fact that there was a gun in the pocket where he was keeping his hand.

Men came out of Pownall's office, talking in low-pitched voices. Most of them were E. B. I. technicians, Lake knew. Pownall's office had been given a painstaking examination.

Lake searched among the faces of the group for the hard-bitten, dark features of Henri Deverac, chief of the E. B. I. He found it—and his last feeble hope died. Deverac's grim expression was anything but encouraging.

The E. B. I. chief spoke in brief dismissal to the technicians, then strode toward Lake. His sharp black eyes were probing as he removed a gold-dappled Venusian cigar from its humidor case and puffed it into light.

"Well, *mon ami*," he said at last, "I am now prepared to hear the explanation of how you and Miss Vernon happened to be found on the scene of *Monsieur* Pownall's fatal plunge."

Lake sent a pleading glance at

Claire and took a deep breath. He had been dreading this moment. Deverac, he knew, was not likely to believe the truth. If he was to gain the freedom and time he needed, then, he had to tell the E. B. I. chief a story he would have to believe. But—how would Claire back him up?

He began, "Claire—Miss Vernon—and I were worried about Pownall. We all worked in the same office, you see, and today Claire and I noticed that Pownall seemed particularly nervous and upset. We discussed it after work this evening. Considering the strange tension that seemed to be affecting government men and the fact that there had already been two suicides, we wondered if Pownall wasn't about to do something...well...drastic.

"We knew Pownall was staying here tonight to finish some work. I decided to call him up on the visiphone to see if he was all right. He wasn't. He had gone completely out of his head. He laughed at me like a madman and told me he was going to jump out of a window.

"Claire and I hurried here. I had to break the lock on the door to get into Pownall's office. But we were too late. He was already half out of one of the windows, and he jumped before I could stop him."

DEVERAC studied Lake from narrowed eyes as he blew smoke from the side of his mouth. "But since this was suicide, *mon ami*, why did you and Miss Vernon consider it necessary to flee the scene?"

Lake shrugged. "We were badly rattled, I guess—just not thinking straight. My only thought then was to avoid any possibility of suspicion that I had something to do with Pownall's death."

"But Miss Vernon could have sup-

ported your story," Deverac pointed out. He turned his attention to the girl. "Were you not a witness to *Monsieur* Lake's unsuccessful effort to prevent Pownall's leap?"

She had been staring at Lake, something close to horror struggling in her eyes. Now her control seemed to break.

"Matt—no!" she cried abruptly. "We can't make matters worse than they already are! We've got to tell the truth."

"The truth..." Deverac echoed softly. His sharp features were suddenly hard. "And precisely what is the truth, *Monsieur* Lake?"

Lake sighed in resignation. He explained events as they had actually happened, beginning with his visiphone call to Pownall and ending with Claire's appearance at the office.

"I wanted to avoid being connected with Pownall's death," he finished. "I knew my presence might cause it to be interpreted as murder. I was positive it was murder—murder of a subtle and indirect sort. And I was positive I knew the person responsible. I wanted time to get proof."

Lake glanced bitterly at Deverac. "You know what I'm talking about. I brought my case to you after Frederick Keith refused to do anything. If you had listened to me, Pownall's death could have been prevented."

Deverac shook his head and dropped into an adjacent chair. "You came to me with what was little more than a fantastic theory. You claim that the Venusian representatives here on Earth, led by Ambassador Ak-Gornn, are secretly working to bring about the downfall of our world government. This they hope to do by causing madness and suicide among our high officials. And the madness and suicides they bring about by means of a secret weapon.

"But what facts are there to show

that a secret weapon exists? Consider, *mon ami*, my E. B. I. technicians are the best trained and most efficient in the world. They went through Pownall's office within an hour of his death. They found nothing to show a weapon had been used. Nothing in the dust, in the gaseous content of the air. No strange radiation, no chemicals, no odors—nothing. Medical examination of Pownall's remains revealed nothing also.

"And you, *Monsieur* Lake, you saw Pownall just before you say he leaped. You were in the same room with him. Did you see anything to indicate that a weapon was being used?"

Lake spread his hands in defeat. "That's the part of it that beats me. Something was used on Pownall and the others. I'm dead certain of that. But what? I'd give almost anything to know."

DEVERAC leaned forward with a bleak earnestness. "Further, *mon ami*, it may astonish you to learn that certain of your suspicions regarding our little Venusian friends are not exactly news to me. The E. B. I. overlooks no eventualities, never misses an opportunity to gather information or evidence which would prove useful in an emergency. Ak-Gornn and his associates, in fact, have been under observation for quite some time. A number of irregularities have been noticed in his activities—but nothing to prove that he is engaged in a plot against United Earth."

Deverac's voice abruptly turned harsh. "On the other hand, *Monsieur* Lake, you are open to a great deal of suspicion. I took the precaution of inquiring into your background after you came to me. I learned that you had been creating considerable annoyance with your accusations against the representatives of Venus. *Monsieur* Keith actually threatened you

with the loss of your position in the Department of Interplanetary Affairs if you did not desist. And you had quarreled with Miss Vernon here who, it seems, had been receiving a great deal of attention from the unfortunate Pownall.

"All these are clear signs of emotional instability. One would be on safe ground, therefore, in assuming that this instability even went so far as to include jealousy of Pownall. Upon learning that Miss Vernon was to keep him company here this evening, your jealousy may even have led you into the decision to murder him. There had been two previous suicides in the government. These quite possibly may have inspired you with the plan to push Pownall from his office window. Your story, if discovered, would be that you had attempted to prevent him from becoming a suicide also."

"But that wasn't the reason I—" Lake was on his feet, shaken. He ran his fingers through his hair. "Good Lord, I was afraid it would look that way. I knew Pownall was interested in Claire. But I didn't consider him a rival. Claire had told me she didn't take him seriously."

He turned to the girl. She nodded quickly, eagerness lighting her eyes. "What Matt and I really quarreled over was that I didn't try to put Pownall in his place. You see, I thought I knew the real reason for his attention to me. He was worried, afraid. And I...well...I didn't want to make matters worse. If it took his mind off whatever was bothering him—"

**A**N AGENT hurried forward from the door leading to the hall. "The Venusian ambassador is outside, sir," he told Deverac. "He wishes to have a word with you."

"So?" Deverac sent a glance at Lake and rose from his chair. "I shall be delighted to speak to Ambassador Ak-Gornn. Admit him at once."

The agent hurried back into the hall. A moment later, two slender, doll-like Venusians glided into the room. They were strikingly human in appearance, though Lake knew from his years on Venus that the resemblance was superficial. Their long, heavily brocaded robes were worn for more than just warmth in Earth's colder climate. Both wore the polished metal helmets of their priestly caste, surmounted by colored plumes. They were flamboyant figures, more than slightly barbaric, yet somehow completely in character.

Ak-Gornn walked foremost as his rank required among his own race, even on Earth. His features were sharper than was usual among Venusians, with a veiled arrogance in the tiny mouth and the huge, luminous green eyes. On Venus, Lake had heard rumors of Ak-Gornn's treatment of underlings—unpleasant rumors, even among a people who accepted the cruelty and abuse of superiors as a matter of course.

Ak-Gornn's glance of recognition at Lake held surprise and a thinly masked hostility. Yet he included Lake in his ceremonious greetings, bowing deeply.

"It was most gracious of you to receive my negligible self, *Tib Deverac*," Ak-Gornn murmured in the piping treble typical of Venusians.

Lake smiled sardonically as he watched. This was the enemy. Child-like, fragile, masking stealth and guile behind exquisite politeness and lavish ceremony. And all the more dangerous for that very reason.

Deverac bowed with French courtliness in return. "I am at your ser-

vice, Your Excellency."

"Circumstances being such that I happened to be in my office in the building," Ak-Gorrn began, "I learned at once of the lamented *Tib* Pownall's untimely demise. Accordingly, therefore, I hastened here to inquire whether I could not possibly be of aid in some humble capacity. I would, in my utter worthlessness, consider it a great honor."

"YOUR OFFER is more than generous," Deverac answered. "But I have already been given the unofficial assistance of *Monsieur* Lake, here. It appears that he was present when Pownall leaped to his death, having made an unsuccessful effort to prevent it."

"Indeed? That is most interesting." Triumph gleamed in Ak-Gorrn's great eyes as he looked at Lake. "Perhaps *Tib* Lake was not actually unsuccessful."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Lake demanded.

"I was, *Tib* Lake, merely considering your well-known impetuosity. It suggests the possibility that your efforts in the case of the tragic *Tib* Pownall may have been to...ah...assist rather than to prevent."

Lake said evenly, "If you want to play with possibilities, then take the one that Pownall's death has a direct connection with the deaths of two other important government men. That suggests the possibility of a plot against United Earth. And that in turn suggests the possibility that another government is behind the plot, since only another government would have the unity of purpose to operate on such a scale. As for the identity of that government, there is only one possibility—the government of Venus."

Ak-Gorrn shrugged delicately. "Your charges do not shock or dis-

tress me, *Tib* Lake. It so happens that I am aware of the insinuations with which you have been attempting to arouse distrust and hostility against the representatives of Venus. I would request an official refutation were it not for your youth and obvious mental derangement."

Ak-Gorrn seemed to dismiss Lake as he turned to Deverac. "It is unnecessary for me to point out that *Tib* Lake's charges are fantastic and ridiculous. Venus owes Earth a debt of gratitude that it can never repay, and is linked to Earth in bonds of undying friendship."

Deverac made a short bow. "But of course, Your Excellency."

"Since I am unable to be of aid," Ak-Gorrn went on, "I will express my deep sorrow over *Tib* Pownall's sad death and remove my unworthy presence. But if you will bear with me a moment longer, there is a small incidental matter which I should like to call to your attention.

"A SHORT time ago I had the honor to make *Tib* Pownall the present of a *zirrit* bird from my home planet. The *zirrit* is a delicate creature and succumbs easily under Earth conditions unless carefully attended to. Just this morning, during a chance meeting with *Tib* Pownall, he informed me that his *zirrit* appeared to have become ill. My people hold the *zirrit* in high veneration, and I offered to look after the one belonging to *Tib* Pownall. Since he personally will now be unable to carry out the arrangement, I would be most grateful if his bird could be placed in my custody."

Deverac hesitated.

Lake said quickly: "Nothing is ever permitted to leave the scene of a crime, Deverac. Don't forget that. If you allow Pownall's *zirrit* to be taken

away, you will in effect be declaring his death as suicide—in which case you have no right to hold me.”

Deverac sent a sharp frown at Lake, but nodded in agreement. “I regret that *Monsieur* Lake is correct, Your Excellency,” he told Ak-Gornn. “I must seek the advice and permission of higher authority before the *zirrit* can be removed.”

“As you say, *Tib* Deverac.” Ak-Gornn bent in a ceremonious gesture of farewell. His eyes rested on Lake for an instant before he turned away.

A little chilled, Lake stared after the departing figure of the Venusian. There was no mistaking the deadly malevolence he had seen in Ak-Gornn’s green gaze.

“*Parbleu!*” Deverac presently burst out. “Have your reckless impulses completely overwhelmed your intelligence, *Monsieur* Lake? Considering the manner in which you baited Ak-Gornn, it is a miracle you did not provoke an interplanetary incident!”

“The smooth, scheming little devil!” Lake growled. “He needed to be taken down a peg or two. He was laughing up his sleeve at us all the time he was showing off his cute Venusian manners.”

Deverac shook his head. “I fear you will be taken down the pegs much sooner, *mon ami*—and many more than one or two. *Monsieur* Keith will initiate the process. I have sent for him, you see, and he will be here at any moment.”

Lake slumped dismally back in his chair. Keith was the last person in the world he wanted to see just then.

**F**REDERICK KEITH, the Secretary of Interplanetary Affairs, hurried into the room several minutes later. He was a portly man with a fringe of iron-gray hair and a seamed, haggard face. His worried glance

sharpened on Lake and Claire.

“What’s this?” he said. “Don’t tell me you two are mixed up in what happened to Pownall?”

Deverac said quickly, “If you will permit me to discuss the situation, *Monsieur* Keith...” He drew the official to another part of the room, where they began speaking in low tones.

Claire’s glance met Lake’s. The concern in her hazel eyes had deepened. “I didn’t think it would be as serious as this, Matt,” she whispered. “If you really didn’t have anything to do with Pownall’s death—”

Lake said bitterly, “You seem more than half convinced I did. Is that why you gave me away?”

Her features twisted with something like anguish. “I had to do it, Matt. I’m sorry. But if you’re innocent, there was no reason for us to lie.”

“Well, telling the truth certainly hasn’t done me any good,” Lake growled. “I’d have been better off by lying. All I wanted was a chance to get proof against the real guilty party—Ak-Gornn. I won’t get that chance now.”

She bit her lip. “What...what do you suppose they’ll do with you, Matt?”

“Nothing much. Penitentiaries and death sentences have become obsolete, you know. So I’ll just get the new psychosynthesis treatments at a rehabilitation center. That’ll make a different man of me. Oh, yes.” Lake’s laugh was ironic. “Legally, I’ll be dead. I won’t remember a single detail of my past life. I’ll have new memories, habits, skills—everything. We’d have to get acquainted all over again. But I don’t think you could stomach it. The other people concerned seldom can.”

“It mustn’t happen, Matt!” Horror touched her face. “I—I’ll help

you. If there's a way to get proof—"

Lake shook his head. "You'd be handicapped by the belief that Ak-Gorn and his stooges are cute little things. I've failed too many times trying to argue you out of it."

"I thought they were. Now I'm not so sure."

"Oh, oh!" Lake muttered abruptly, stiffening. "Here comes the bad news."

**K**EITH AND Deverac were walking forward. Their low-voiced conversation had left them both looking solemn and a little unhappy.

Keith said wearily, "I warned you to stop your one-man campaign, Matt. Now look what's happened."

"But Pownall would have jumped even if I hadn't lifted a finger to stop him," Lake protested. "The least I could do—"

Keith lifted a hand. "That appears to be your story. Very well. The point I want to make is that while suicide is bad, the suspicion of murder is much worse. Our government already suffers from a queer undercurrent of panic, and the shock of outright murder might easily bring chaos. No person would feel safe any longer. Everyone would feel in danger of being killed by someone else—a co-worker suddenly turned homicidal maniac. I most certainly don't want the responsibility for that to be laid at the door of my department.

"For that reason," Keith went on, lowering his voice, "I have persuaded Deverac not to hold you. The evidence against you is more or less circumstantial...at present. Certain details of Pownall's death need to be verified, but until then I don't want you held. I'm sitting on what may very well be an atomic explosion, and I want to keep it from going off as long as is legally possible."

Lake was incredulous. He had expected anything but this turn of events. "You mean I'm free? I can walk right out of here?"

"Out of here—but not too far away," Deverac said coldly. "I am not yet finished with you, *mon ami*. Bear that in mind."

"One other stipulation, Matt," Keith added. "I'll have to ask you to resign from the department. I've warned you once, and I can't take any further risks with your activities—altruistic or otherwise."

Lake hesitated, then sighed in defeat. "All right. But look, what am I expected to do from now on—sit on my hands? Won't I be given a chance to clear myself?"

"You will be wise to sit on your hands, *mon ami*," Deverac returned. "Should I discover you in competition with the E. B. I., I shall immediately change my mind about this whole doubtful arrangement."

**C**LAIRE PUSHED aside her glass and accepted Lake's cigarette. The taproom was softly lighted, intimate in atmosphere. Hushed music came from the tiny TV unit in the wall of their booth.

"You don't sound like a man who intends sitting on his hands, Matt."

"Something's got to be done," he said grimly. "Whatever line of investigation Deverac takes, it certainly isn't likely to include Ak-Gorn. And I know Ak-Gorn is behind what has happened."

She shook her gleaming dark head. "But what can you possibly do? Deverac warned you not to get in his way. And, Matt, I'm positive one of Deverac's agents followed us here. That must mean he intends to have you watched from now on."

"There are ways of getting around that. I'll have to if I'm going to ac-

comply anything at all."

"Just what is it you hope to accomplish, Matt?"

"Ak-Gornn has something—a trick we know nothing about. I've got to learn what this is. I couldn't walk right up to him and ask how he gets our government men to jump out of windows or put bullets through their brains. And I couldn't just sit and wait until he tackles another victim. I've got to force his hand."

Lake scowled reflectively into his glass. "A lever to pry him open with—that's what I need. Pownall's *sirrit* is one possibility. The Venusians worship the things, you know, and Pownall's actually did look sick, now that I think back on it. Ak-Gornn wouldn't like to have anything happen to that bird. He was plenty mad when I kept him from getting it."

"What's the Venusian religion all about, Matt?" Claire asked. "How do the *sirrits* figure in it? You were on Venus."

**L**AKE SHOOK his head. "The Venusians don't care to have their religion pried into. Their temples are open to everyone—theoretically. But there are parts where only those of the priest class are allowed. The *sirrits* are mostly kept out of sight, too. There's something queer about those temples, something—"

Lake broke off abruptly. "Good Lord!" he breathed. "What a blind fool I've been!"

Claire looked bewildered. "What is it, Matt?"

"The answer to everything!" He was tense with excitement. "I've found the way to force Ak-Gornn's hand, Claire—wreck his whole rotten scheme! But I've got to get hold of Pownall's *sirrit*. Deverac wouldn't cooperate with me, of course. That means—"

"Matt!" she gasped. "Don't tell me you have some wild idea of breaking into the World Capitol Building!"

"It's the only way," he insisted. "I can't lose any time, Claire. By morning it may be too late."

"But Deverac's having you followed! He'll learn what you're up to almost at once."

"I told you there were ways of getting around that. I'll take you home first, Claire. Then—"

"No," she said firmly, almost with anger. "I'm staying with you. If you're going to get into trouble after what I've been through already, it won't make much difference to me whether I'm in it with you or sitting it out on the sidelines."

"Good girl!" He gripped her hands. "This whole mess is practically settled right now."

Lake left the booth and drew the barman aside. He displayed a bill. "The lady and I want to get out of here without using the front door. Can you give us an assist?"

The bill seemed to vanish as the barman's fingers touched it. "Through the kitchen in back. The alley will let you out on the next block. Come on. . . ."

**W**ITH ITS vast base planted solidly in the midst of park-like lawns, the World Capitol Building reared its awesome height into the darkness. Lake and Claire avoided the illuminated main approaches. From the quiet thoroughfare on the edge of the building grounds where their jet-copter taxi had set them down, they cautiously made their way toward the freight docks at the rear of the colossal structure.

Here was an efficient bustle of activity that never ceased day or night. Rumbling in a majestic ebb and flow of motion, huge trucks backed into

the docks or pulled away, discharging their cargoes and taking on others. Freight handlers swarmed along the dock platform under the brilliant glow of floodlights, moving a steady stream of boxes, sacks and barrels. A veritable city in itself, the focus of civilization on three planets, the World Capitol Building was an organism whose demands were numberless and insatiable.

Lake drew Claire into the shadows at the far end of the vast dock arcade. He watched the activity for a moment, then spoke softly: "Wait here. If I'm going to get you into the building too, there are some things I'll need."

She nodded wordlessly, her hazel eyes gleaming with excitement. He stepped into the arcade with an assured and purposeful air and mounted a short flight of concrete steps to the top of the dock platform. He had prepared himself with an old jacket and a battered hat. In his disguise and amid the crowd of freight handlers, he hoped to pass unnoticed.

He moved deliberately through the swarming men, his eyes alert. Then he found what he was seeking—a pile of empty sacks and boxes that lay awaiting removal. Casually he tucked one of the sacks under his arm and moved back along the platform to where he had left Claire. His path took him past an unused hand truck that stood against a pair of numbered doors, and without hesitating he took this with him.

The spot where Claire waited was a safe distance from the center of the dock arcade where the activity was mainly concentrated. With the added protection of the shadows at the edge, she was unobserved as she crept into the sack.

Finally, carrying the concealed girl up to the platform and placing her in a crouching position on the hand

truck, Lake started back into the crowd. Men moved back and forth through tall doorways that led into the cavern-like recesses of the building. Lake strode indistinguishably among them as he worked his way toward one of several banks of freight elevators. He entered one of the cars as it emptied and quickly punched the buttons. The door closed, and the car started up.

**S**IGHING WITH relief, he helped Claire out of the sack. "Anyway," he told her, "so far so good. I hope getting into Pownall's office is going to be as easy as this."

He watched the floor numbers pass on the indicator, while the girl straightened her hair and brushed at her dress. The trip seemed to take an eternity. Tension built up in him again, keeping pace with the mounting indicator figures.

The seventieth floor passed. Lake reached into his jacket and took out a slim metal tube several inches long. He examined this briefly, and a cocking lever at one end made a faint clicking sound as he set it.

"What's that?" Claire asked curiously.

"Sort of a gas gun. I carried it around with me on Venus. It shoots cartridges containing a colorless, odorless gas—instantly effective. We aren't allowed to carry firearms on Venus, you know, but it was a good idea to have protection of some kind. The stuff an Earthman usually has with him—wristwatches and the like—is worth a fortune among Venusians. And they weren't above an occasional bit of robbery—murder too, if necessary."

The elevator neared the ninety-third floor, slowed and stopped. The door opened. Lake peered out into a service hall, then gestured for Claire to



follow. No one was in sight at the moment, but from an adjacent hall came the droning of a sweep-car.

Glancing around hurriedly, Lake saw a small motor cart used for delivering supplies. He motioned Claire into the bin, and she grimaced as she climbed inside. Satisfied that she was hidden from sight, he started the cart, backed it in the proper direction, and set out. Any persons along the route would take him for one of the night staff. At least until he was close enough to use the gas gun.

He passed a couple of figures far down a cross hall. They carried cleaning equipment and paid him no attention. A few seconds later he reached the hall where the Department of Interplanetary Affairs was located.

A uniformed guard stood at the door.

Lake whispered a warning to Claire and continued forward without hesitating. His pulse leaped as the distance swiftly decreased. Oddly, however, the guard took no notice of the approaching cart, standing completely motionless. Lake gripped the gas gun tensely, but he had a growing conviction that something was wrong.

**HE** LEARNED what it was when he reached the guard. The man was unconscious, his muscles rigidly set, evidently paralyzed.

"I don't get it," Lake told Claire. "How could this happen? Maybe—"

Eyes widening, he leaped toward the door behind the guard. It opened readily under his hand. The outer office was dimly lighted, silent as a tomb. He found the light switches on the wall nearby, flicked them on. He peered around for a long moment, then gestured to Claire.

"What is it?" she whispered as she joined him.

"I think," Lake said grimly, "someone got here before us. Stay by the

door, just in case."

He hurried to Pownall's office. Cautiously, standing well to one side, he pushed the door open. Darkness and silence. He reached around the edge of the frame and switched on the lights.

Except for the *zirrit* in its cage, the office was deserted. The *zirrit* shifted uneasily along its perch, ruffling its silken feathers and darting bright, wary glances at Lake. He stood looking at it for several seconds, then hastily roused back into action.

Claire stared at the cage he was holding when he joined her at the door. The *zirrit* within it lay motionless at the bottom.

"Had to use gas on it," he explained briefly.

"Yes, but why did you—"

"The *zirrit* in Pownall's office wasn't the same one I saw before," he said. "Ak-Gorrn evidently had his stooges put in a replacement. They had some sort of a gas weapon, too, and they used it on the guard out there. And if they're as clever as I think, they did it without the guard seeing them or knowing what hit him. He'll wake up thinking he fell asleep."

He took the girl's arm. "Come on. We're leaving. If I'm right about the way the Venusians left the building, we won't have to worry about being seen. All the other guards will be sleeping, too."

Lake dimmed the outer office lights. In the hall, with Claire and the cage in the cart, he hurried toward the elevator bank. He pressed the signal button, and a car started up toward them.

**HE** FELT a triumphant glow. He had the evidence he needed—evidence that would not fail to convince Deverac. With it he would reveal Ak-Gorrn's treachery beyond any possibility of doubt and win complete

vindication.

He saw that the elevator was nearing his floor. He spoke to Claire, and she joined him openly in the hall. With the cage in his hand, he waited for the elevator door to open.

Claire gasped. She had turned to glance back at the guard, who had been standing motionless where they had left him. Now, following her gaze, Lake saw that the man was motionless no longer. The paralysis obviously had worn off.

The guard was rubbing at his forehead and staring about him as if puzzled. In another moment he saw Lake and Claire. He stiffened in complete alertness, then started forward, a hand jumping to the holster at his side.

"You two!" he said. "Stay where you are!"

The elevator door opened.

"Quick!" Lake hissed at Claire. He leaped after her into the car and pressed the button for the thirtieth floor air landing terrace. The closing door cut off the sound of the guard's angry shouts, and the car started down.

"He'll have an alarm out in another minute," Lake said in despair. "If I'm going to have a chance to put the rest of my plan into action—"

"What are you going to do?" Claire asked.

"It all depends on getting out of the building first."

The floors dropped away with maddening slowness. Lake watched the indicator, feeling Claire's fingers bite into his arm in a kind of sympathetic awareness of his own urgency. At last they reached the landing terrace, and the elevator door opened.

The sound of a bell filled the wide foyer beyond. Two uniformed guards stood beside the revolving doors that led out to the terrace, but they were

rigid and unheeding.

Claire began, "Why, they're just like—"

"It's the one last break I was counting on," Lake exulted. "Come on!"

As they started toward the revolving doors, the figures of men burst into sight from both ends of the foyer. Shouts rose.

Lake thrust Claire into the revolving doors and hurried after her. They erupted out into the floodlighted expanse of the terrace.

A jet-copter stood off to one side, its overhead vanes moving. This was all Lake had time to notice. He caught Claire's arm and bounded toward the craft. Tearing open one of the rear doors, he prepared to help the girl inside. He froze in dismay.

Two Venusians crouched on the seat, pointing unfamiliar cylindrical devices. One was Ak-Gorrrn.

"We were just about to depart, *Tib Lake*," he said. "But we saw you approach and gave you an opportunity to join us."

Frantically, Lake started back. He saw the strange cylinders flash, felt a rush of vapor against his face. He held his breath, but the outlines before his eyes dimmed and receded.

He felt hands grip him, pull him forward. Then the pressure of acceleration as the jet-copter rose—and then sensation and awareness were gone.

**B**UT NOT FOR long. Holding his breath had helped him to avoid the full effects of the gas. Consciousness crept back, but his muscles were still numb and unresponsive.

He remained motionless. After several minutes more, he found that he sat propped against one side of the jet-copter. Claire lay half against him, unstirring, while the cage with the *zirrit* stood near his feet.

Ak-Gorn's companion had moved up front, beside the pilot. Ak-Gorn himself evidently occupied the other end of the rear seat, but Lake did not want to betray his recovery by moving.

He fought for full control of his body. Both he and Claire were in deadly danger, he knew, and time was swiftly running out.

Even as he fought, the jet-copter began dipping down toward a section of the city where dim lights and huddled buildings gave an effect of seclusion. He recognized it as the Venusian district. Here, surrounded by their business establishments and warehouses, the Venusians followed the alien, ritualistic patterns of their culture, an island in the vast ocean of man's civilization on Earth.

Anything could happen here, Lake realized. Here he and Claire could vanish without trace.

A broad roof appeared directly below, and floodlights went on about a landing space as the jet-copter dropped down.

Aware that his opportunities for escape were narrowing to the vanishing point, Lake tried desperately to move. But his body seemed leaden. The dose of gas he had taken appeared to have affected his nervous system in an oddly uneven way.

"Ah, I see that you have revived, Tib Lake." Ak-Gorn was peering at him, an automatic looming huge in his tiny fist. "Excellent! It simplifies matters a great deal."

Beside Lake, Claire stirred. She lifted a hand to her forehead and glanced bewilderedly around her.

Ak-Gorn's satisfaction seemed to increase. He snapped orders at his companions in the front seat, and they climbed out to take up guard at the doors. The pilot, Lake realized fully for the first time, was an Earth man—

a hard-featured renegade.

AT AK-GORRN'S impatient commands, Lake left the jet-copter. He moved stiffly and clumsily, but the last of the paralysis was leaving him. He helped Claire out, and they were herded toward a doorway across the roof. Ak-Gorn and his underling followed watchfully, the latter holding the *zirrit's* cage.

Lake caught an anxious glance from Claire as he guided her across the roof. She seemed to have reached complete understanding of the situation.

"Well, what do you think of your cute little Venusians now?" he whispered.

"It...it's like a nightmare, Matt. What are they going to do with us?"

He shook his head soberly. "I wish I could say it was something pleasant. But I don't think so."

"Silence!" Ak-Gorn snapped behind them. "You will speak only when commanded to do so." He appeared to be enjoying his dominant role.

Lake and Claire were ushered into the building, down a long hall and into a small plain room. There they were ordered into a couple of spidery metal chairs that stood against the wall opposite the door. Ak-Gorn's companion carefully placed the cage with the *zirrit* on a low table. The bird still lay in a motionless huddle on the bottom, but Lake knew it was due to revive soon.

The landing of the jet-copter seemed to have been noticed, for a Venusian in a yellow tunic appeared—a servant, as indicated by his cringing manner.

Without relaxing their vigil, Ak-Gorn and his underling removed their brocaded robes and plumed helmets. The servant took these and left.

The room was warm and humid, a subtly alien quality in its atmosphere. Ak-Gorn wore only a silk-like tunic

and laced sandals. With the other-race characteristics of his body now clearly evident, there was something repellent about him—inimical and menacing. In his sinuous limbs and smooth glistening skin was a hint of the reptilian. He was completely hairless, with a spiny ridge of skin running from his head to his back.

"Just what is this all about?" Lake demanded. "I think Miss Vernon and I are entitled to an explanation of why we were brought here by force."

**A**K-GORRN SHRUGGED. "Miss Vernon's presence is unfortunate. She is what might be called an innocent bystander. As for you, *Tib* Lake, I'm quite sure you know why I took you into custody."

"Then you know more than I do."

"This is no time for pretense, *Tib* Lake!" Ak-Gorn snapped. "I have been fully aware of your activities against me. It appears that you realized, as your stupid police authorities have not, that it is I who am responsible for the madness and suicides among the officials of the United Earth government. I considered you harmless enough—but it seems you have somehow stumbled upon evidence."

Ak-Gorn gestured toward the cage on the table. "I do not know how you arrived at the truth, but you gave yourself away during our interview with *Tib* Deverac. In preventing me from obtaining *Tib* Pownall's *zirrit*, you revealed to me your suspicion that the bird had something to do with his death. And with Miss Vernon here, you returned in an effort to gain possession of the bird."

"But I anticipated you, *Tib* Lake. I arrived at *Tib* Pownall's office before you—only minutes before, it seems—and I replaced the *zirrit* with one of a harmless type which would have re-

vealed nothing upon investigation. I was still present at the World Capitol Building when you and Miss Vernon appeared, and fortunately I was able to...ah...assist your escape. I am certain that I acted quickly enough to avoid being seen."

Ak-Gorn moved his automatic in a beckoning gesture. "My curiosity regarding one certain detail is still unsatisfied, *Tib* Lake. Exactly what led you to the discovery that the *zirrit* was responsible for *Tib* Pownall's death?"

Lake said slowly, "I was alone with the bird for a few minutes after I failed to save Pownall. I had a strange feeling—the sort of feeling everyone in the government seemed to be having, but much stronger. I thought it was due to the shock of what Pownall had done, but later I recalled having the same kind of feeling several times before—around the temples on Venus. So I realized that what I'd experienced in Pownall's office was connected with something Venusian, and the only Venusian object there was the *zirrit*. Then I realized how the bird produced the effect it had—through sound far above the audible range. Supersonic frequencies.

"These frequencies affect the brain and nervous system. Some produce a feeling of unease and depression. Others produce actual pain and are capable of causing madness. If the frequencies are high enough, in fact, they can lead to death by disrupting the cells of the brain in much the same way that a note sounded by the human voice can shatter thin glass."

**T**HE ROOM was filled with a baleful stillness. Ak-Gorn's huge eyes were lidded and bleak.

"Go on, *Tib* Lake."

Lake drew in his breath with an effort and plunged on: "I don't know

if the *zirrits* are capable of damaging brain tissue, but it's clear that they can produce the other effects. Pownall and the others slowly went mad. There already was a great deal of pressure on them; the United Earth government was facing a crisis, being threatened with breaking up. With the *zirrits* as a constant disturbing influence, Pownall and the others just couldn't handle their jobs. Suicide became the easy way out."

Ak-Gorrn nodded slowly, a reluctant admiration in his face. "An excellent example of deduction, *Tib Lake*. What you do not know, however, is that actually there are two types of *zirrits*, one of which is quite harmless. It was a harmless *zirrit* which I substituted for the one originally in *Tib Pownall's* office, and ironically it was this which you went through such great risks to obtain.

"The harmless *zirrits*, you see, act as...camouflage for the dangerous type, thus diverting suspicion from them. Both types were presented to the officials of your government, the dangerous ones going to key men whom I wished removed."

"How does it happen that there are two types of *zirrits*?" Lake asked. He hoped the Venusian would not recognize the question as an obvious bid for time. He hoped to keep the other talking long enough until...

The subject evidently was one that interested Ak-Gorrn. "The dangerous type," he explained readily, "was an accident of nature; the result of a mutation among the harmless type. The Venusian priesthood carefully protected and bred the mutation, but it is still quite rare, and its existence is a secret known only to those of the priest class—of which, as it happens, I and my immediate associates are members. The dangerous *zirrits* are useful in eliminating interference on

Venus also, and we of the priesthood find it to our profit to keep our people from learning about them.

"*Zirrits*, of what I have chosen to term the dangerous type, have one disadvantage: They do not live long. Producing the supersonic frequencies, you see, requires tremendous effort on the part of the bird and results in serious exhaustion which presently ends in death. It produces the madness frequencies only when frightened, and on Earth it is in a state of almost constant fright."

"What about your race?" Lake asked. "How do the dangerous *zirrits* affect Venusians?"

AK-GORRN HESITATED, as though reluctant to answer. Then he shrugged. "I should not divulge this information, *Tib Lake*, but you are in no position to make use of it... Where Venusians are concerned, *zirrits* of the dangerous type are unquestionably lethal. Venusian brain structure is more delicate than that of Earthmen. If the dangerous *zirrits* are in close range, with no reflecting materials to protect their victims, the frequencies they emit produce almost instant death. There were numerous fatalities among the priesthood until we learned to devise metal helmets capable of shielding the wearer. These helmets have become an important part of the priestly costume."

"I see," Lake breathed.

Ak-Gorrn's face hardened. "The information I have revealed, *Tib Lake*, is potentially of great danger to the Venusian cause. On the one hand, all our efforts would be wasted and our plans permanently ruined if the United Earth government learned that we were responsible for the deaths of its officials. The *zirrits* would be proof of our duplicity. On the other hand, if the secret of the *zirrits* were revealed

to the Venusian people, it would mean the downfall of the priesthood and therefore of the present ruling class.

"Both possibilities must be avoided at all costs. I and the others of my class have long-range plans for Venus. Dealing with individual Earth governments instead of one total unit, we can win important concessions for Venus. In time, Venus may well challenge the supremacy of Earth itself. Therefore, *Tib* Lake, you and Miss Vernon must be permanently silenced."

"Murder?" Lake said. "You can't hope to get away with it. My death will be traced to you the very first thing."

Ak-Gornn smiled thinly. "The circumstances will be sufficiently clever to absolve me from suspicion, *Tib* Lake. Your evidence against me dies with you, of course. And I was not seen to enter or leave the World Capitol Building during the substitution of *Tib* Pownall's *zirrit*. You, however, were. In *Tib* Deverac's eyes, this will be proof of his suspicions concerning you—proof that you suffered from the very madness that you credited to the others in the United Earth government.

"You stole the *zirrit*, so it will appear, in a clumsy attempt to divert suspicion to me. In your escape from the World Capitol Building, you kidnapped the pilot of a jet-copter. The craft developed—or will—a mechanical fault and crashed, killing its pilot and passengers. A regrettable accident. The pilot does not know of the role he is to play, but it can easily be arranged without his knowledge. He is of your race, and his loss will be of no importance. You and Miss Vernon will be unconscious, unable to interfere. Certain...head abrasions, if found on you at all, will be considered the natural result of the accident."

The Venusian's tone sharpened:

"Enough! I shall waste no more time, lest there be a suspiciously long interval between your boarding of the jet-copter at the World Capitol Building and its crash. Turn around, *Tib* Lake! You also, Miss Vernon."

Lake glanced at the girl. The sick despair in her hazel eyes was an echo of his own. He knew what was coming. Once they turned, they would be clubbed into unconsciousness.

THERE WAS only one thing left to do, Lake realized. He could throw himself at Ak-Gornn, sacrifice himself to ruin Ak-Gornn's plan of making his and Claire's deaths look accidental.

He gathered his muscles for a leap.

"Careful, *Tib* Lake!" Ak-Gornn spat. And then he stiffened, a grimace of pained surprise twisting his features. His gun thudded to the floor. His hands went to his head, pressing as though against a sudden, unbearable pain. He moaned. His eyes squeezed shut.

The other Venusian did likewise. He fell first, his face a writhing mask of torment. Then Ak-Gornn slumped to his knees, made a last effort to remain upright, and dropped in a motionless huddle.

Lake saw all this through a fog. His own temples swelled and throbbed with pain. He had a wild impulse to club himself, to dash his head against a wall. The agony was excruciating, maddening. It seemed that death would be a welcome relief.

But a realization of triumph enabled him to keep a fingernail grip on sanity. He glanced at the cage standing on the table nearby and saw that the *zirrit* had revived. Its silken feathers were puffed out, its large eyes glittering as though in terrified comprehension of what had happened to it.

Claire was moaning, her eyes shut

tightly, her teeth biting into her lower lip. Lake caught her arm.

"Claire—quick! This is our chance. We've got to get out of here."

He paused to pick up the automatic that had fallen from Ak-Gorn's fingers. Then he turned the hairless head to look at the glazed green eyes. He pressed a finger to a vein in the neck, found no pulse. Ak-Gorn was dead.

Leading Claire, Lake hurried to the door. The servant in the yellow tunic was coming up the hall. He stared at Lake and released a shrill yell of alarm. Lake fired over his head, and the Venusian turned wildly and ran.

"Come on!" Lake pulled Claire after him as he ran toward the opposite end of the hall. He flung open two doors before he found the one that opened into the breeze-swept expanse of the roof. The floodlights had been turned off. Lake peered into the darkness, but could find no sign of life.

The jet-copter stood where it had landed not long before. Lake and the girl were hurrying toward it, when the floodlights blazed into brilliance. Instants later, a group of Venusians spilled from the doorway through which Lake and Claire had emerged. Among them was the jet-copter pilot, his taller figure looming above the child-like shapes around him. He shouted for the Venusians to spread out.

**D**ESPITE THE panicky haste that filled him, Lake forced himself to stop and aim deliberately. The weapon in his hand jerked and flashed. He wasn't aiming merely to frighten now. Escape—life itself—depended on shooting to kill.

A thin scream lifted from one of the charging Venusians. He fell rolling. Behind him a second dropped,

and a third tripped on the body and fell sprawling. Two others stopped to whirl back toward the doorway.

A gasp from Claire brought Lake around barely in time to meet the charge of the jet-copter pilot. Fingers wrapped around Lake's gun hand, and a swung fist glanced along the side of his head, bringing an explosion of pain. Out of balance, dazed, he went down under the pilot's rush.

The jar of the fall cleared his head. He saw the other kneeling over him as the man sought to twist the automatic away. Deliberately he pulled, brought the pilot down atop him. Then, with a heave and a twist, he jerked the automatic loose from the clutching fingers. Whirling to pin his opponent beneath him, he brought the barrel of the gun down in a clubbing blow to the other's head. Again he swung—and again. The pilot went limp.

Climbing back to his feet, Lake saw that the Venusians had taken advantage of the fight to close in. Hopelessness filled him. There were too many of them. And they were close, too close. He couldn't get the jet-copter up in time.

And then a rushing noise made his eyes jerk skyward. Two jet-copters were dropping down out of the night.

He sagged in defeat. Reinforcements, he knew.

Figures began leaping from the jet-copters even before their wheels touched the roof. Lake checked the swing of his automatic, staring. For the figures were those of men—human beings!

The Venusians had checked their rush. Now, yelling in fear, they began racing back toward the doorway.

Lake found himself looking into the hard-bitten dark features of Deverac.

"So you could not cease to play the knight-errant, eh, *mon ami*?"

Deverac demanded. "But fortunately, as I have said before the E.B.I. overlooks no eventualities. Ak-Gornn and his henchman have been under observation, and thus I learned almost at once that you and Miss Vernon had been brought here. I came as soon as I could gather sufficient force for an invasion."

**FREDERICK KEITH** leaned forward to place his pipe in an ash-tray. Flames in an antique fireplace threw a warm glow over the book-lined walls of his study.

"What I don't understand," he told Lake, "is how the *zirrit* was able to affect Ak-Gornn at all. According to your story, Ak-Gornn substituted Pownall's *zirrit* for a harmless one. And it was the harmless one that you took."

Lake grinned. "That's what Ak-Gornn thought. But in Pownall's office I saw that a switch had been made—and so I arranged another switch."

Keith stared, then chuckled. "That was clever of you, Matt—damned clever. But where in the world did you get the *zirrit* to replace the one Ak-Gornn had already substituted?"

"Out of your office," Lake said.

Keith stared again, and his face tightened in a frown. But he caught Deverac's amused glance and laughed wryly.

"Well, I still think you were clever,

Matt. I'll concentrate on the end and overlook the means. I don't think the Venusians will make any more trouble. The Venusian people, you see, are going to be told how their priesthood has been preying on them by means of the mutant *zirrits*. The news isn't going to make them happy. So I imagine there will be a new government on Venus, a friendly and co-operative government.

"But most important of all, United Earth is no longer in danger of splitting up into warring camps again. The knowledge that the Venusians were plotting a crack-up, and that it was not our own weaknesses under pressure, will bring back the old spirit of unity and harmony."

"I'm glad," Claire said. "United Earth—it has a nice sound. And it has gotten to be a habit, to mean something deep and personal."

Keith nodded soberly. "One thing more, Matt. I'll expect you back to work in the department, of course. And considering your abilities, I think I can find a more important position for you to fill this time."

Deverac sighed. "I was about to offer *Monsieur* Lake a suitable opportunity in the E.B.I. But perhaps for a married man the work would be too dangerous."

"It certainly would!" Claire said decisively.

THE END

## IS BLOOD THE KEY?

by  
L. A. BURT

**M**AN'S ORIGINAL may soon cease to be the mystery it now seems. The Royal Anthropological Institute is setting up in London, England, a reference center for the mapping of man's blood groups. The center will gather and classify the vast store of current knowledge available on blood group information.

Such information may shed light on the genetic relationships of different groups of peoples and on the past wanderings of

the early nomadic tribes.

Peoples on different parts of the earth show startling differences in blood groups, so that outcroppings of unusual blood groups in certain areas could indicate the past settlement of certain groups from other regions.

It is expected that the origin of the American Indian may be among one of the puzzles to be worked out by the reference center.



# DEATH BY DEGREES

*By Robert Arnette*



"Hurry up!" Wright snapped. "If you expect to save your own race, find that answer!"



**Knowledge, they say, is power. But never tell that to a Callistonian; he'll prove to you that too much brains means death!**

**"D**AMN!" Greg Stevens exploded. The up-to-now silent and dark S O S light-buzzer in the upper right hand corner of the instrument panel had suddenly glowed into redness. He called sharply, "Don!"

"Yeah?" a sleepy voice answered.

Greg didn't reply. A moment later the unshaven face, tousled hair and sleep-leaden eyes of Don Parker appeared over the edge of the berth compartment manhole and saw the winking warning light.

"What the—" Don said, abruptly wide awake. He propelled himself

through the manhole, expertly manipulating himself into the seat beside Greg.

The automatic log was typing out the details. A sealed S O S unit was operating thirty degrees off the ship axis at four o'clock, three hundred and seventy thousand, plus or minus eight hundred, miles away.

Greg was already thumbing the gyro controls to swing the ship's axis into line with the signal.

"There goes our date tomorrow night with those two babes at Mars Station," he grumbled as he vented his spite on the buttons. "Who the devil could be stuck out on this God-for-saken run—unless it's a wrecked spaceliner drifting..."

His eyes, suddenly anxious, went to the autopilot screen. The data was appearing there in bold letters. *Rel. Vel. 84736 m.p.h. For'd thrust 3.4; 4.27.30 hrs.*

"A little over four hours and we'll be there," he said unnecessarily.

"Well," Don mumbled, yawning widely, "I'm going back to bed. No reason why I shouldn't get the rest of my sleep." He looked at the panel clock. "Almost three hours of my sleep period to go yet. Call me, Greg."

He shoved upward gently, using one foot to bounce off the top of the instrument panel and float toward the manhole. There he pulled himself through.

A moment later he called, "Okay, Greg."

Greg moved the C-R lever over to For'd 3.4. The instrument panel and the whole room swung slowly until it assumed the position of a table top before the pilot seats.

**T**HEN, ABRUPTLY, the illusory gravity of velocity-change was present in the ship. With it came the almost inaudible vibration of the

chemical rockets.

Three hours later Don Parker lowered himself through the manhole of what was now the ceiling of the room, swinging expertly to a narrow catwalk around the instrument panel, and dropping into the seat beside Greg's.

"Can you see it yet?" he asked quietly.

"It's a chunk of metal about a thousand yards the long way," Greg said. "Take a look. I think it's just an asteroid."

Don squinted through the ship's telescope. "Yeah," he said. "Whoever sent that signal must have cracked up on it."

"Or landed on it in lifeships," Greg said. "It would be easier to search for than a small ship."

"Get a rise out of them on the radio?" Don asked.

Greg shook his head.

For the next hour they sat patiently, waiting for the ship to reach its destination. Then began careful maneuvering so that rocket gasses wouldn't strike their target in too great concentration.

Don uncovered the four viewports for direct vision as Greg brought the ship in close to the hulking mass of metal and rock. It became stationary in the six o'clock porthole, a hundred feet below.

The magnetic anchor shot out, drifted lazily across the intervening space, leaping the last few feet. Slowly the C-R patrol ship crept down the anchor cable until it rested against the asteroid.

Suddenly a moving figure appeared in the three o'clock porthole, space-suited, one corrugated arm waving. The figure moved out of sight sternward.

Greg pressed the key on the instrument panel that released the outer

door of the airlock, to permit the person outside to enter. The red dot of a light beside it blinked on, then off. The green dot under it glowed faintly, getting stronger as the pressure inside the airlock crept up to ship pressure.

With a hurried last minute glance at the instrument panel to make sure everything was in order, Greg and Don floated out of their seats, shoving against the panel in the direction of the longitudinal shaft leading to mid-section and the airlock to greet the newcomer.

THE HELMET came off, revealing the red hair and beard of one who has spent years in space, the crinkly eyes of a man who has listened only to himself for long periods and enjoyed the conversation, the deeply wrinkled neck of a man on his second half-century. The head lifted, thin nostrils dilating as they sucked in a lungful of the ship air.

"Ahhh!" a voice sounded from somewhere near the upper part of the thick beard. "Best air I've breathed for a long time. Howdy, youngsters. I'm Jonas Jones."

"I'm Don Parker," Don said, "and my partner is Greg Stevens. Were you the only survivor?"

"Survivor?" Jonas echoed in surprise. "Well, I guess I am. Not that I had any trouble surviving. My ship isn't wrecked. I was the only one on it."

"Oh," Greg said. "Then you're out of fuel?"

"No," Jonas said, slipping out of his spacesuit to reveal himself as still quite muscular in spite of his age, a little over six feet tall, broadshouldered and medium hipped.

"Then what—" Don said, and stopped, waiting for the old man to explain.

"Fact is," Jonas said, "I—say! You

two have your first stripes. Rookies. Guess that's the reason you haven't heard of me. I used to be in the service. Most of us prospectors were at one time. That's where it got in our blood. Well..." He glanced at Greg anxiously. "Fact is, I saw you were heading close by, so I thought you wouldn't mind dropping over to pass the time. Gets sort of lonesome..." His voice died down as he waited for their reaction.

"You mean you called us off our orbit just to chat with you?" Greg said with ominous quietness. "You used the sealed S O S unit for that?"

"Well..." Jonas hesitated. "I haven't had anything to drink for about four months either." He fixed Greg with a concerned eye. "Am I making you late for a date at the end of your orbit?" he asked. "Heck. I hadn't any idea..." He reached for his spacesuit to put it on.

"Take it easy, oldtimer," Don spoke up, laughing. "So we miss a date. I guess it's worth it. I only hope someday when I'm done another rookie returns me the favor."

Jonas's eyes swung anxiously to Greg.

"Okay, Jonas," Greg relented. "Now that it's done I guess it's okay. I'll have to report you for violation of S. O. 86A though, which says—"

"No sealed S O S unit is to be used for any other purpose than calls when in distress under penalty of fines and imprisonment not to exceed five hundred dollars in fines and not to exceed two years imprisonment," Jonas quoted. "But they only impose the prison sentence when violation of another law is shown, and it'd be worth five hundred dollars to talk to someone when you've been out here as long as I have this time."

"Good enough," Greg said, smiling. "Forget it. Let's have a few drinks.

Then we'll shove off—and no hard feelings."

He led the way into the midsection lounge and started up the motor when Jonas and Don were in. The twenty-foot-in-diameter drum began to revolve. The centrifugal force crept up to one gravity and held there, making the drum a comfortable room with a floor twelve feet wide and over sixty feet long.

Jonas sank down in a comfortable overstuffed chair and glanced around and upward appreciatively.

"Long time since I've experienced such luxury," he sighed happily. "You modern patrol units have it soft. Soft. But I don't envy you too much. In my day we didn't have centrifugal gravity to relax comfortably in. Out in space for months with nothing to hold our stomachs down. Didn't even dare use our fuel for velocity-change gravity. Waste, they called it, to do that. But there were plenty of things to compensate for it. Things that you new men will never see, because they're gone now. Destroyed to make it safe for you."

"Yes?" Don said, winking slyly at Greg as he busied himself mixing cocktails. "Give us a f'rinstance."

"A f'rinstance?" Jonas said, accepting the drink Don handed him. "Well, I guess a f'rinstance would be the suicide bugs of Callisto. The books say Callisto has vegetation but no animate life, but in the early books—if you can find any the government didn't find and destroy—they're listed. Methane breathers. Egg layers. Life span unknown because they kill themselves. But there aren't any more. A couple of brass hats got retired over that, and I would have had a promotion and probably been one of the top brass by now except that they decided it was better to completely ignore the fact that the suicide bugs

ever existed..."

He sipped his drink and smacked his lips appreciatively, looking from Don to Greg, and deciding they were interested.

"THE FIRST landing on Callisto was way back in 2084," Jonas began, his eyes getting a faraway look. "Almost a hundred years ago. I was a first loot, just over legal age. But it wasn't the government ship that landed there first. The space-rush was on. Financiers were backing private exploratory trips by daredevils. To encourage this and save on the tax bill the government was granting exclusive rights to those who landed first and filed their claims. And it was a devil named Art Wright who got there first. Five years before our ship, the *Alaska*, got there in 2089. Did I say he was a devil? That's too mild a word.

"A group of financiers had pooled their money and formed what they called the Interplanetary Enterprises Incorporated—which has no connection with the modern I. P. E. because they sunk all their money into this, one way or another, and went broke. But Art had landed and been there for five Earth years when we arrived.

"He found that Callisto had plenty of all kinds of raw materials. Most of its metal deposits were in the pure state. Oxygen there, like on all the methane satellites, was a scarce quantity, and burning occurred in reverse. Vegetable substance released oxygen which made a flame when it encountered the methane air. And there was plenty of vegetation. On most methane worlds there's only vegetation and no animal life.

"Callisto, Art found, was the exception. It was literally over-run with small creatures no more than two

inches long. They lived in dense communities near the edges of cliffs, along the shores of the ocean and the rivers, and almost nowhere else.

"He arrived during their egg laying season. They were weaving compact nests out of the flexible tough grass that grew everywhere, laying their eggs, then weaving the nests shut up tight. It wasn't until he had been there a month that they began committing suicide in droves.

"He'd noticed before that when he tried to catch any of them they headed for the nearest cliffs and leaped off. And Callisto has nothing but high cliffs. When they started committing suicide they went over the cliffs in droves. Finally there wasn't anything left but eggs. It was that way all over Callisto.

"He knew that the only creature known to commit suicide besides man is the scorpion. Anyway, it interested him. Along with his prospecting, he studied these bugs.

**H**E FOUND a nice flat place down where there were no cliffs and planted some of the eggs there. In a month or two after the mass suicide of all the bugs the eggs started hatching out. All the bugs grew up rapidly, and laid their eggs for the next generation. Even those he had transplanted. Then the suicide fever took those in the high places and they went to their ancestors. But the ones he had transplanted couldn't find any way of killing themselves. A few days after the others had all gone these started destroying their eggs. They destroyed every one of them. Then they marched several miles to the nearest river and drowned themselves.

"That answered why there were only bugs where there were places for them to commit suicide. If any wan-

dered from those spots to live they killed their eggs before dying, so that no more were born there.

"The whole thing began to prey on his mind. He was a sort of a nice guy, then. What happened later—maybe a lot of men would have done the same. I don't know..." He paused, looking glumly at his empty glass.

"Want another?" Don asked.

"You sure it won't run you short?" Jonas asked. "Well..." He sighed contentedly as Don took the glass and went to the bar.

"Next," he continued slowly, "Art tried to get one of the bugs alive. Ordinary anesthetic gasses wouldn't work because they're about the same as methane in structure, and acted as stimulants. He soon realized this. Anesthetics were foods for the bugs, oxygen burned in Callisto's atmosphere. He should have thought of it first off. He put a whole group of them to sleep with a wave of oxygen when the wind was just right. While they were unconscious he picked them up and carried them back to camp, putting them each in a separate cage.

"They lived on grass, so he put plenty of grass in with each one. They hadn't come to when he finished supper so he went to bed, and when he got up again and went out to look at them they were all dead. They'd hanged themselves."

Jonas took the filled glass and sipped appreciatively.

"Well," he said, swiping at his beard with a sleeve, "that gave him his first clue to the whole thing. Each of them had done an intelligent job of hanging itself. It was obvious to him that they were at least as smart as people!"

**J**ONAS PAUSED and looked questioningly at Don and Greg, then went on: "He thought it over and de-

cided if they were that intelligent maybe they could be reasoned with if they were contacted young enough. So after the next mass suicide he took some of the eggs and placed them in the cages, making about a dozen more so he could afford a failure or two without ruining the whole experiment.

"When the young ones hatched out he started making friends with them. He was smart. He had them fixed in cages so that each one of them thought he was alone in creation except for Art. He taught them to read and write. It was easy enough. Too easy, almost. Remember, they matured in about four Earth months.

"When the time came to lay eggs they couldn't, being kept alone that way. And when the rest of the bugs were jumping off the cliff in droves these were too busy studying higher mathematics and science to think about anything else.

"I think it was about that time the great plan came to him. With these bugs to do the brain work he could rule the Solar System! He started giving them problems to work for him. Problems he knew the answers to—like the ideal shape for a U-235 reactor. They figured it out from scratch without benefit of experiment—and got the same answer that Earth science had after half a century and a few billion dollars' worth of experiments. They did it in a few days, each one independent of the other, and each one right!"

He took a deep gulp that drained his glass.

"Two days later they all committed suicide," he said quietly.

He stopped talking and looked up at Greg and Don.

"No!" Don exclaimed with exaggerated protest. "Not after all that trouble!"

Greg flicked a smile at Don and

added, "And just when he was probably about to give them the problem of making a reactor out of ordinary materials!"

"I don't know about that," Jonas said vaguely, "but they left stacks of notes behind them. Art started going through those notes. Before long he made what he thought then was his big discovery. It was quite a shock to him, too."

He hitched forward until he sat on the edge of the chair, erect, his eyes full of fire above the expressionless expanse of his beard.

"Without saying anything to him, each one had quietly gone ahead on his own individual line of abstract research. Each had considered the problems Art gave him child's play, and had worked them just to humor him. And each one of them had solved all the final mysteries of Creation! Oh, they hadn't written them down. They weren't that buggy even if they were bugs. But when they'd gotten all the answers, Art figured, they sat back and asked themselves what was the use.

"The way he saw it—for them—it was unbearable. Minds capable of solving any mystery right from scratch, and to have all the future with nothing to solve. They had all the answers. It was like a spaceman being grounded irrevocably. They cracked up, Art figured. That's why they killed themselves."

As he came to a halt in his story Don took his empty glass.

"No, no," Jonas protested. "Two's enough—well, all right, just one more."

"It didn't take Art Wright long to figure things out," he said, when the filled glass was back in his hand. "Billions of bugs born in Callisto every six Earth months, each sitting down now and then and thinking about things, and finally arriving at the an-

swers to everything—meanwhile laying the eggs that would be the next generation.

"Then they realize their horrible plight. Nothing else to work on. Nothing. They've got to end it all. But then the next generation will go through the same thing. So they want to destroy the eggs. Some race instinct tells them that's wrong. The urge grows. To resist it they plunge over the cliff. And every blasted one of the next generation does the same thing, solving problems humanity has been unable to, then killing itself! That's the picture Art got."

**J**ONAS got to his feet and restlessly walked the full length of the floor, appearing upside down when he was half way around. He dropped into the chair again after he made the full circuit.

"It was undoubtedly the most tragic state of affairs in the whole universe there on Callisto," he said. "Minds such as man has never brought into being..." He shook his head sadly.

"That wasn't the end?" Don asked cautiously.

"No," Jonas said. "That was only the beginning. It had taken Art Wright two years to figure out all that to his satisfaction. And," he added darkly, "Art Wright was no fool."

He glared defiantly at Don and Greg as though daring them to deny this. They stared back at him expressionlessly. He dropped his gaze back to his cocktail glass, wet his whiskers in its bubbling contents, and went on: "He had to wait a couple of months for more eggs to start over with," he said. "During that time he did a lot of thinking. The trouble was, he knew, that the bugs were too darned smart. If they were only half as smart they'd still be ten times smarter than a human genius—but maybe not smart enough to figure out all the answers

in one lifetime. Then their brains could be harnessed and made to work on the schemes that Art was dreaming in that distorted mind of his.

"By the time he could collect a dozen new eggs to start on, he had the right answer. He rigged oxygen tubes to each cage, with needle valves so that only the very finest stream of the stuff would leak in. Just enough to keep them slightly dulled but not actually doped up.

"He didn't use the oxygen the first month, letting them grow up and learn to read and write so he could get along with them, before starting to dope them. And since he didn't have oxygen enough to waste it like that very long, the first big job he put them on was figuring out a reactor that would produce oxygen in great quantities. They invented the iron-bismuth cyclo unit that is used today in all spaceships to make oxygen. If he had stopped there he and his company would have been rich. But to him it was just a means to a greater end."

"I thought the iron-bismuth cyclo oxygen-generator was developed at the Los Alamos Center," Greg said.

"The government let it appear that way," Jonas said. "They had to keep the whole Callisto affair quiet, but naturally they didn't ignore the few things salvaged from it."

"Oh," Greg said. "I see." He winked at Don.

**"A**NYWAY," Jonas said, "he was ready to carry out his big scheme. It was simplicity itself. He wanted some weapon that could have no defense. Something with which he could become absolute ruler of humanity. It had to be something he could produce right on Callisto."

"And I gather," Greg said dryly as Jonas paused, "that they produced it for him, so that when the space



patrol called there finally he presented them with an ultimatum?"

"Not exactly," Jonas said with slow emphasis. "Of course, that's what he expected them to do. But they didn't."

"Then what did they come up with?" Greg asked, a little irritated at this promise of prolongation of the tale.

"Nothing," Jonas answered with imperturbable calm. "They killed themselves one after another. But he got something out of it, anyway."

"You see, they were kept separated so that none of them knew of the existence of any of the others—or of any living creature besides itself and Art. And one of them announced that he was on the track of something really terrific. He told Art to come back in an hour and he would have it. Art came back after an hour to find it had killed itself a few minutes before."

"Ah-ha!" Don said. "Then the reason they all killed themselves was because they all figured out this potent weapon and it scared them so much they couldn't stand it."

"No," Jonas said. "Art figured it right. While they were working on the problem of the weapon, they ran across something else that scared them. Something that had nothing to do with a weapon. It began to get him, a little. It would anybody. He had been intimately acquainted with two dozen of these creatures now. Even if they were only bugs they thought like humans and had personalities. And all over Callisto every few months the entire population committed suicide. He knew now it wasn't because they had solved everything. It was some fact they had all discovered independently that scared them so much they couldn't stand it. Something so bad they had a strong urge to kill their offspring before they could hatch out."

JONAS paused, glancing intently from one to the other of the two men.

"So," he said abruptly, "he tried a different angle on the next batch he raised."

"Look, Jonas," Greg said. "I hate to interrupt you, but we have to get going on the rest of our patrol."

"Oh," Jonas said, rising, "I didn't know you were in a hurry. Don't let me hold you up! I can always finish telling you about the suicide bugs some other time." He stood expectantly, as though waiting for them to escort him to the airlock.

"That isn't what I mean," Greg said hastily. "Of course we want to hear what happened. But can't you come to the point?" He looked at Don for support.

"Can't very well," Jonas said. "You wouldn't understand. You wouldn't believe me unless I took you step by step."

"Why don't you tell us what you and the patrol met when you arrived there?" Don suggested. "Maybe we can get it from there without your building up what Art went through."

"Well..." Jonas said. "But it won't be the same. Still, if that's the way you want it..." He looked at them hopefully, then gave in.

"When we got there," he continued, "Art greeted us warmly and said he was ready to go back home to the Earth—that there was nothing there and he had spent most of his time on scientific study. He acted very secretive—nervous to get away. He would have left sooner, he said, but his ship was unable to take off. We looked it over for him, and sure enough his autopilot was burned out. Then we—"

"What was his ultimatum?" Greg asked impatiently.

"He didn't give us an ultimatum,"

Jonas said. "As a matter of fact, after we found out his autopilot was burned out and we didn't have replacement parts with us for that model, we took him on board and eventually deposited him at a passenger-stop satellite station above Mars. That's the last we saw of him."

"But you heard of him again?" Don asked, his eyes twinkling.

"It was almost a year after we dropped him off," Jonas said. "The whole crew was called in and told in strict secrecy what Art had done. He'd proven that at a certain time in the near future the sun would become a nova and destroy all life in the Solar System."

"You mean," Greg said with unconcealed skepticism, "that he'd already done something that would make it one?"

"No," Jonas said, "I mean that if left alone the sun would become a nova. It's a regular cycle. Art showed them the theory and the proof. They proved it and figured out the time by themselves, the scientists, and it agreed exactly with the figures Art gave them."

"And," Greg said, "I suppose he was the only one who knew how to prevent it, and his price was dictatorship over mankind?"

"No," Jonas said. "He knew a way to make it happen now, at any time. It was a beautifully simple plan. Somewhere in the Solar System, disguised as an ordinary asteroid—actually a hollowed out asteroid—was the device. It was designed to convert certain elements into certain others. The first elements were in the sun in great quantities. The elements it could make out of them were the elements whose accumulation in the proper concentration would cause a nova. And this weapon was set so that unless it was redirected in its orbit at periodic intervals it would plunge into the sun.

Once there it would go to work, building up the quantity of stuff necessary to start the nova going."

Jonas studied the shocked expressions on his listeners' faces with satisfaction.

"I SUPPOSE he had a model of the device to prove it was possible?" Greg asked after a moment.

"For once you guessed right," Jonas said. "He'd built it somewhere on Earth after he left us and before he contacted the government. I never saw it, but heard it described. Its parts were of stuff that wouldn't melt in the sun. One was a special type of compressed asbestos with the magnetic properties of the finest transformer alloy at several thousand degrees of heat, but with no sign of magnetic qualities at lesser temperatures."

"All that is very nice," Don said, "but it would have been a simple matter for the government to force information from him, find the asteroid from that data, and destroy it."

"No," Jonas said, shaking his head. "The orbit of the asteroid was any one of an infinite number that could wind up in the sun at a definite predetermined time. At a certain time that unknown orbit could be altered by a fixed rocket blast to assume another of the orbits that would take it into the sun at a still later date. Art didn't know where the asteroid was. He didn't have to know."

"Then they could force out of him the information necessary to keep it from ever entering the sun," Don persisted.

"Wrong again," Jonas said. "Knowing the wave-length and everything else would do no good. The signal was a spoken word or sentence in Art Wright's own voice. And it had to be in a certain tone. If they drugged him

that tone couldn't be reproduced. He had to be free and in an emotional state of freedom. The suicide bugs had thought of everything."

"Well," Greg said in weary frustration, "they obviously found some way out, because Art Wright isn't dictator of mankind and the sun didn't turn into a nova."

"No," Jonas said, "they didn't find a way out. They found a way around it."

"What do you mean, a way around it?" Don asked.

"I think I know," Greg said eagerly. "They built a similar machine to take this product of the first one and convert it back into harmless elements again. Then when the first one plunged into the sun the other one was there to counteract its activity!"

"Well..." Jonas said reluctantly, "that's the idea they had in mind, all right. Only one thing wrong with it. This element Art's machine made is a sort of catalyst to radioactivity and disintegration, and is very rare. There's less than a pound of it in the whole mass of the sun. Another pound and—poof!—the sun is a nova. Dropping a machine into the sun that would convert it into harmless elements, that machine—even if it were enormous—would find only about one atom of the stuff a month to convert, while Art's machine would be converting the harmless stuff into millions of those atoms every day." Jonas chuckled dryly. "In fact," he added, "Art helped them find all that out. It would have taken more of the counter-transmuters than the sun would hold to exactly balance the production of his one machine, once it got started."

"Then how did they find a way around it?" Greg snapped angrily.

"That's why they called us in," Jonas said, unperturbed. "The one thing Art hadn't told them was where he

got all his knowledge. He'd implied more or less that he'd figured all this out himself while on Callisto. That seemed doubtful, so they brought us in to question us about what we found on that moon. Of course we hadn't found anything. We hadn't looked much.

"I remembered vaguely seeing some bugs running around. Several others remembered them. We'd stayed away from the bugs, thinking maybe they might be dangerous or poisonous.

"They had us closeted downstairs in the Octagon Building questioning us all very closely to see if one of us could remember seeing anything that might point to a civilized race on Callisto. They got nothing. But the upshot of the whole thing was that they decided to send a party to Callisto to try to unearth something."

"God!" Greg muttered. "Here we go again!"

"Another drink, Jonas?" Don suggested cheerfully.

THE SILENCE under the clinking of glasses, the gurgling of liquids, and the smooth subdued hum of the ship was one of imponderable frustration and suspense as Jonas waited patiently for his drink.

Greg stared at him, the light in his eyes alternating between murder and deep thoughtfulness. Finally he said soothingly, almost hopefully, "Of course you were one of those who went to Callisto, and went through the same steps Art Wright had, and came up with the plan for going around what Art had done, by getting the suicide bugs to think up something..."

Jonas shook his head but said nothing, waiting for the highball. When Don handed it to him he wet his lips and sighed in satisfaction.

"You really know how to mix a

drink, youngster," he said. Then he turned to Greg. "No," he said, "I wasn't one of those who went to Callisto. If I had been I wouldn't be alive today. You see, Art hadn't stopped his oxygen generators. They had gone on producing oxygen until there was enough in the Callistan atmosphere to reach flash concentration. So when that expedition started to land on Callisto their rockets touched it off. In less than a minute the whole atmosphere of Callisto had blossomed out into a small nova of blinding heat as the methane and oxygen exploded. It wasn't the heat that killed those boys though. The explosion threw their ship out of control and it crashed. The crash killed them. And very quickly the heat dissipated. The water produced by the flash combustion rained down on the surface for days. The carbon dioxide even today forms a good part of Callistan atmosphere. Of course, there's still plenty of methane too because the amount of oxygen generated hadn't been enough to burn up all the methane present, and the methane producing plants all over Callisto have replaced a lot of the original methane."

"Then," Greg said, taking a deep breath to control himself, "since the suicide bugs were obviously all destroyed, how in—how did anyone find a way of getting around Art and defeating him?"

"They didn't just then," Jonas said. "They gave into him. They had to. But they stalled him along. He was all for announcing his overlordship at once—quite insane. Megalomania or something, they called it. However, they convinced him that it would take time. The human race would have to be softened up a bit for dictatorship, or there would be revolution right away. They salved him a little by kowtowing to him, surrounding him with bodyguards to keep him

from imaginary assassins, giving him everything he wanted. He listened to speeches he thought were broadcast all over the world, but which were brought to his set by special concealed wire service.

"When the time came for him to redirect the asteroid to keep it from plunging into the sun, they simply took recordings of his voice to use for future redirection of the thing. They never did find it, but they kept broadcasting Art Wright's voice to it every day or so. That created a series of rocket discharges at right angles to the sun's direction, so that eventually it would gain escape velocity from the solar system. Then they locked Art Wright up. He was quite insane by that time."

"That's the end?" Greg asked hopefully.

"Not quite," Jonas said. "Remember, the sun was due to become a nova anyway before long. So they built thousands of transmuters like the one Art had made, only designed to transmute this disintegrator catalyst into harmless atoms. They're in the sun right this minute. They don't find much to work on, but the whole thing is down to a pat formula now. These transmuters in the sun destroy as much of the stuff as is normally produced in the sun's radioactive cycle, so it will never become a nova. And they found the oxygen generators Art had left on Callisto and copied them, making the world believe they had been developed at the Los Alamos center."

Almost sadly Jonas studied his half empty glass. Then he tipped it up and drained it.

"Thanks for the drinks, youngsters," he said, standing up.

"SIT DOWN a minute, Jonas," Don said.

"Let him go, Don," Greg pleaded.

"Maybe we can make that date if we blast away at full acceleration."

Don shook his head. "I want a few things cleared up," he said. "For instance, Jonas, you said a couple of brass hats got retired over that affair and you would have received a promotion. I take it the brass hats that were retired were the ones that sent those men to Callisto without running a spectro on its atmosphere again."

"Right you are," Jonas said.

"Then what did you do to rate a promotion you never got?" Don asked. "You weren't one of those on that ship that was destroyed. And you said you never saw Art Wright again, so how do you know all he did when he was there alone on Callisto?"

"Well, you see," Jonas said, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other, "Right after the big blast they called for a volunteer to go down and see if any of that first crew was alive. It had to be only one man because if any of them were alive they'd have to be brought up. That first ship had been one of the *Alaska's* auxiliary boats. Short of landing the *Alaska* itself—which would have been dangerous and a terrific waste of fuel—another of the auxiliaries was the only thing. So I took on the job."

"You mean you went down in that hot atmosphere?" Don said incredulously.

"It wasn't so hot," Jonas denied. "Only two or three hundred degrees, and the ship was equipped with a water-cycle refrigeration jacket same as all planet-boarding ships have even today."

"You found the wrecked ship?" Don asked.

"Yes," Jonas admitted. "I got the bodies out and loaded them on the auxiliary."

"That all you did?" Don asked.

"I sort of looked around a bit,"

Jonas said reluctantly. "Took the ship up and landed it at Art Wright's old camp. I could stay out of the ship for about an hour at a time before the heat leaked into my spacesuit. I found the oxygen transmuter and the cages. The whole setup. The transmuter was too heavy to load, but there were stacks of notes that hadn't burned. I took them. They told the whole story."

"And turned them over to your officers on the *Alaska*?" Don asked.

Jonas bridled. "Of course!"

"Only one thing more," Don said.

"You say the early space guides listed Callisto as having life on it."

"When Art Wright first arrived in Callisto he beamed that information back to the nearest space station," Jonas said, "along with the fact that he had arrived safely and was therefore entitled to possession under the Homestead Act in the name of the company he represented."

"Well..." Don said thoughtfully.

"I guess it sounds okay. Nice story, Jonas," he added, grinning.

"What do you mean, story?" Jonas said. "It's the truth!"

"Why sure!" Greg said. "We believe you." He grinned at Don and added, "I do, anyway."

"Of course," Don said soothingly.

"By saying it was a nice story I didn't mean it wasn't true. I meant that you told it well."

"Oh," Jonas said, relaxing. "Well, since you youngsters are in a hurry I guess I'll be leaving. Sorry I made you miss your dates."

"Quite all right," Don said. "We can always have other dates."

Greg was already slowing the cylinder to a stop. A moment later they left the room.

They watched him put on his space-

suit, their expressions blank.

"Why don't you come with us to Mars Station?" Don offered impulsively.

"Me?" Jonas said incredulously. "I like it out here alone. Got the homiest little asteroid in the System!" A grin split his beard. He dropped his helmet in place and twisted it into its slots. "Be seeing you your next trip out if I'm still in your territory."

With a farewell wave of his arm he went into the airlock and pressed the button that would close it and pump out the air.

WHEN THE airlock door had closed Greg sighed tiredly.

"What a relief!" he said. "Let's blast away from here fast. And I hope I never see the old blowhard again."

"You mean you don't believe his story?" Don asked mockingly.

"No," Greg said, "and I don't think it was worth the drinks he got out of us either."

He went back to the pilot compartment. When Don followed him through he was already touching the controls preparatory to shutting off the magnetic anchor and getting under way.

Don floated down into the seat beside him. He looked out the ports, but Jonas was nowhere in sight.

"You sure he's out of the way of the blast?" he asked.

"He's not green enough to get caught that way," Greg snorted. He held his finger poised over the firing stud. "Here goes," he said.

Once again there was a downward direction in the compartment. The instrument panel was once more a table surface spread out conveniently in front of the two men.

Jonas's asteroid dwindled rapidly.

Greg leaned back, relaxed. He turned his head and glanced idly at Don. There was a frown on Don's face.

"What's the matter?" Greg asked. "Something's bothering me," Don said. "It began to bother me while Jonas was telling his story. Something I can't quite put my finger on."

"You mean about his story?" Greg asked, glancing sharply at him.

"Maybe..." Don said slowly. Abruptly he was sitting up straight, a startled expression on his face. "How could he have known we were coming?" he asked in a strained voice. "We were too far away, when that SOS first came, to see his asteroid as a recognizable object. We were in free trajectory so no rocket tail could have told him."

"That's right!" Greg said, surprised. "I didn't think of that."

"It would have been impossible for him to know," Don said, "yet he did. How?"

"Another thing," Greg said. "Why is he parked on that asteroid? Most space prospectors don't spend more than a month or two on one—and that only if it has something that will pay them to mine. Yet he invited us to drop over if we passed him on our next trip. He should know as well as anyone that won't be for months."

"There's something else," Don said. "If he went down onto Callisto to rescue those other men, maybe he could have picked up some of those eggs."

"You don't think his story had any truth in it, do you?" Greg asked, smiling.

"Suppose," Don said, "that one of those suicide bugs was on our ship. It could have beamed him a message."

"Don't be silly," Greg said uneasily. "What would one be doing on our

ship?"

"It might have gone to Mars Station the last time a patrol ship stopped to talk with Jonas, and have been coming home," Don said.

"You mean he's raising them on that asteroid?" Greg laughed.

"In it," Don said. "A hollowed out one, like that one that was supposed to have the transmuter in it. Shut off the rockets and swing the ship around by the gyros so I can look through the telescope."

When Greg had complied, Don searched for the asteroid.

"I can't find it," he said finally. "It has to be less than five thousand miles away and it isn't."

Greg glanced at the autopilot data and said, "It has to be. I'll turn the radar scanner on it."

The radar screen brought three points, the closest over a hundred thousand miles away.

"That's impossible," he muttered. "The asteroid couldn't just vanish!"

"Maybe it could," Don said with slow emphasis. "There's something else, too. Jonas never told us the real reason for the suicide bugs killing themselves all the time."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Greg asked.

"Suppose you were one of the suicide bugs," Don said, "and a human was plaguing you to help him conquer the human race. If I were one and the reason I would want to kill myself and destroy my descendants was because the sun would very shortly become a nova, I think I would try to use him to change that. If that's what those bugs that worked for Art Wright did, then all Jonas would have to do to keep them from killing themselves is to tell them about the transmuters in the sun—something they couldn't figure out from dead reasoning."

"Well," Greg said, jabbing at the gyro controls to swing the ship back to firing direction, "no way of finding out now. Ha! It would be funny if it were true. A little bug in a space-suit stowing away for a ride home, and Jonas talking our leg off to give it a chance to get off the ship! But it got off back at the asteroid—if there was one. It wouldn't be around now." He glanced around nervously.

But the three happy, excited Californians had divined his intention and ducked out of sight.

THE END

## In the forgotten Past is . . .

# THE SECRET OF THE SOUTH SEAS

**A**LMOST ALL of the larger islands in the South Seas contain ruins of awe-inspiring structures whose cultural origin is unknown. Today, these islands are dominated by the Micronesians and the Polynesians. They have lost the knowledge of writing, are almost ignorant of metal working, ceramics, weaving. But their legends and traditions tell of heroic wars and ancient migrations, when the brave men of Samoa, Tonga and Tahiti sailed in their boats across the unknown ocean and left relics of their high culture everywhere.

The wonderful tales of these islanders, their myths, the splendor of their poetry and their philosophies, their ornamental abilities, their outstanding techniques in

shipbuilding and in handicrafts—all indicate a rich cultural past.

Remnants of their former civilization are found deep in the forests, far from their present-day settlements. There are traces of agriculture, stone monuments, circular walls, the ruins of fortifications. Although today the natives live in huts, there are remnants of stone houses. There are abandoned canals, quays, streets.

In the Carolines are walls 100 and 200 yards in length, which are composed of stones 25 feet long and 12 to 15 feet wide. On the Coral Island is a strange monument consisting of two vertical blocks of stone, nearly forty feet high, across the tops of which rests an enormous flat

stone. Since the present natives use only small canoes, the method by which these tremendous loads were transported to this island remains secret.

And on mysterious Easter Island—what secrets lie hidden behind the Moais, stone figures 65 to 80 feet in height, which have been there for hundreds or thousands of years? The stark primitive faces tower to the sky. An English expedition in 1900 counted 550 of these idols, a forest of heavy pillars resting on terraces 500 feet in length. Products of decades of hard labor, they were cut from the lava of an extinct volcano and brought from their quarries across the entire island by means of stone cylinders, stone wedges, pulleys and ropes, to their resting place on the slopes of a distant mountain.

In old stone houses built underground, were discovered remarkable paintings and wood-carvings, and enough scepters to supply a hundred generations of monarchs. There were a number of wooden plates marked with hieroglyphics. But all attempts

to read these have been fruitless. More symbols were found on wooden beams and tools and rocks—proving that the Rapanui islanders possessed a written language, and that in the far distant past they advanced their civilization as far as that of Celebes, where similar idols of stone are to be found.

But by the middle of the last century the degeneration of the natives had already progressed so far that in 1864, when the tablets were found by the English voyagers, not a single native of the islands could decipher the writings.

The natives are no longer equal to the labors of their forefathers. Their vital energies have long been on the decline; on most of the islands their population is decreasing. Their artistry is no longer capable of the monumental, but displays itself only in handicraft.

And thus the civilization of a people reaches a high—and then comes down again to start the difficult climb back up.

—Glenn Otis

Meet...

THE MEN

WHO LAID THE TRACKS

by

DALE

LORD

NO NAME is more hallowed or honored in modern rocketry than that of the famous engineer-mathematician, Professor Hermann Oberth. The shy, self-effacing genius, much like our own Robert Goddard, has never come to the attention of the public. But his work is known wherever rockets have been made. His famous book, "Die Rakete zu den Planetenräumen" is one of the most famous technical publications of its kind. "The Rocket Into Interplanetary Space" sounds like an imaginative piece of fiction. Actually, it was a carefully calculated, thoroughly reasoned piece of thinking on the mechanics of rocket flight and the mathematics of astrogation. It is no wonder that it took the small world of rocket enthusiasts by storm when it appeared during the Twenties. Incidentally, this book is still as authoritative as the day it was written, and it is remarkably prophetic.

A recent magazine has disclosed that Oberth has projected a new idea for interplanetary travel which would make use of a rocket driven by electric propulsion, the exhaust mass being ejected from the jets by electrostatic repulsion. This is a rather unique idea, and it will be interesting to see whether it is scientifically sound. We are inclined to regard Oberth with strong respect, naturally, for what he has accomplished, but we still think that the near future of rocketry belongs to the liquid-fueled rocket rather than to either an atomic or an electric one. In fact, of the latter two, the atomic seems considerably more probable. Nevertheless, we shall listen to Dr. Oberth.

It has also been disclosed that he did

rocket research at the experimental station Peenemuende, on the Baltic (now in Soviet hands), and that while he did not directly contribute to the development of the V-2, his basic discoveries were extensions of problems common to all rockets, war-like or not.

Dr. Oberth, it might be noted, was one of the foremost advocates of the fundamental principles of interplanetary astrogation, computing and laying the foundations for such familiar concepts as space stations, spiral orbits to land with, and similar important basic ideas.

If men like Goddard and Oberth had been more aggressive and had presented their ideas with more conviction, it is quite possible that the present stages of rocketry would be considerably farther advanced, though there are those who will maintain that it was the war which essentially accelerated matters. Whatever the truth of the matter, today in every rocket engineering and research laboratory in the world, from White Sands through Peenemuende to Leningrad, you will find the libraries carrying an absolute necessity, Oberth's famous book side by side with Goddard's more humbly titled but no less important "On a Method For Attaining High Altitudes". These books constitute the Genesis of the Bible of rocket work. Both men did not desire to see their ideas perverted to war, but both men can rest assured that eventually Man is going to use them to attain the noblest goal of them all—the flight to interplanetary space! The Moon first—then Mars!

\* \* \*





He was in the grip of something beyond mankind's knowledge; something trying to take his sanity!

# A DAY TO FORGET

*By Charles Creighton*

**Crazy or not, Hal was determined to get rid of this incredible statue. But can you destroy a thing that never existed?**



HE TURNED LEFT off O street and into the long stretch of Grant Road. He drove almost mechanically since it was late and there was not much traffic in Lawrenceburg around midnight. His mind was divided between Norma Watts and what had transpired in Hayden, the county seat, only a few hours before.

It was a warm pleasant night, with a sliver of moon hanging in the clear sky and the smell of growing things coming in from the countryside beyond the small neat homes and modern business district that made up the town. The whistle of a late train came faintly in at the window.

Norma was going to be pleased. He smiled. She'd been quite sure that the county committee's letter inviting him to come to the meeting had meant he would be asked to run for some political office.

Well, County Prosecutor was certainly a step forward.

He caught sight of a street marker. Tenth. Four more blocks. The road was clear now and his foot pressed down on the accelerator. Suddenly something shot up out of the concrete directly in front of the car.

Tate slammed his foot on the brake and twisted the wheel sharply to the left, the car skidding to a stop, its bumper inches from the thing.

What the hell was it?

He became aware of hurried movement to his left and presently a face was thrust into the open window. It belonged to a police officer.

"What's the matter, you blind? Or drunk?"

Hal Tate jerked in startled surprise before resentment flared in him. "Neither! When the devil did they put that monstrosity up?"

"Lemme see your driver's license."

Tate fished his wallet from the back pocket and flashed his County identification badge.

"Okay! Sorry. But you still ought to be more careful."

"Careful? How can they expect you to be careful, putting that thing up in the center of the road," Tate said.

The officer had relented somewhat on seeing the official badge. Now he became bellicose again. "Well, it's been there for years. You ain't no stranger, Mr. Tate. You ought to know that."

That was too much. "Don't tell me it's been here for years. It wasn't even here this morning."

"You have been drinking. Maybe you'd better just go on—"

"Sure I'll go on. But don't try to make a fool of me. I know this thing wasn't here a while back."

"Hey," a voice demanded. "How about getting your heap out of the way and letting a guy get around the statue?"

"Oh, shut up!" Tate shouted, completely aroused now.

There was the sound of a door being opened and an instant later being slammed closed. Then the other driver was standing by the side of the police officer. "What's the matter, offi-

cer, this man drunk?"

Tate also got out of his car. He was suddenly aware that there were other people around. There was a workman still in his stained overalls, and an elderly woman. But they were on the fringe of the group about the car.

"No! I'm not drunk and I'm not crazy. This officer is trying to tell me this granite thing has been here for years."

"Years?" The other driver was genuinely puzzled. "My father was a kid when they put it up."

Tate felt panic take hold of him. They were making him out to be a psycho. He turned to the workman. "Did you ever see it there before?"

The seamed, heavy face of the man didn't change expression. "Well..." he began. Then he saw the scowling look the officer gave him, and the words died in his throat.

Tate turned to the woman. A lost cause. She was looking at the stone thing with absolute bewilderment. Even as he started to call to her, she turned and walked away.

The officer turned a furious face to Tate. "I'm about fed up with this. Look!" He shoved a thick-fingered hand past Tate's face. "See that ivy? Think that stuff grew there since morning?"

Tate saw the vines silhouetted against the headlights. They reached for a two-foot length along the near side of the granite shape. He hadn't noticed them before.

"Well, what do you say, Mac?" the other motorists asked. "How about getting your heap out of the way now?"

**A**LL THE anger left Hal Tate. Only bewilderment remained. He saw the futility of argument. He turned and went back to his car, backed it up and drove on again, tak-

ing care to skirt the statue. The few blocks to Norma Watts' house passed as if in a dream.

It was late, but he knew she would be waiting up for him. The door opened and yellow light flooded the vestibule. Then her slender figure blocked out the light.

"Honey!"

He smiled wanly at her happy greeting. Then her arm was entwined with his and she was pulling him forward.

"I was beginning to wonder whether you were coming. It got so late..."

"I promised," he said.

"That's why I waited. Dad's in the kitchen. He said to bring you in."

At Legion meetings, Ed Watts was the first to make a motion, at the Elks' Club, he was the first to promote anything in the interests of welfare, and in his hardware business he had the reputation of being a shrewd merchant. But at home he stood third on the list of important personages. His wife Elsie, and his daughter Norma, outranked him.

He was seated at the snack bar, deep in a glass of milk, a sandwich in one hand. He greeted Tate through a mouthful of food: "Hi, Hal! Or should I say Governor?"

Tate smiled. "Morning, Mr. Watts. No. You shouldn't say Governor."

Norma called from beside the open refrigerator: "Sit down, honey. I'll fix us a snack and we'll join Dad."

"Well, don't hold back, son. What did Ray Whittlesey say?" Watts demanded.

"They want me to run for County Prosecutor."

**W**ATTS EXTENDED his hand. "Congratulations, my boy. You know that's just as good as being elected in this county."

Norma let loose with a squeal of

delight, ran forward and threw her arms about Tate. "Darling! Oh! I'm so happy."

Watts smiled broadly at the sight. He liked Hal Tate immensely and thought how nice it would be to have the County Prosecutor for a son-in-law. They could run a stag now and then at the Legion and not have to worry about the cops being called in. They might even elect him as Commander....

Not bad.

His smile faded slightly at Hal Tate's next words.

"When did they put up that statue on Grant Road? The one between Tenth and Eleventh?"

Watts exchanged glances with his daughter. "Why...long as I can remember it's been there. But you ought to know that, Hal."

"Why do people keep telling me I ought to remember?" Tate said angrily. "I don't."

"Well, you should," Norma said. "We've passed it dozens of times."

"You're sure of that."

"Of course I am, darling."

Quite suddenly, Hal Tate knew there was something he had to do. "Norma, Mr. Watts, I hope you don't mind, but I've had a hard day, and I'm just completely knocked out. I think I'll run along."

Watts and his daughter exchanged glances again. This time they were worried. Tate's sudden anger. And the strange question about the statue...

"Well, finish your sandwich and milk, honey," Norma said.

"I—I wasn't as hungry as I thought," Tate said lamely. He got up and moved toward the door. "I'll give you a ring in the morning, Norma. 'Bye, Mr. Watts."

**H**E HAD no hammer, but a pair of pliers would do as well. The full

moon riding the center of the sky looked like a ball of curdled milk, but it served to illumine the statue. He tapped at the stone.

It wasn't hollow.

He tapped once more, this time with force.

Nothing happened.

He hit it with all his strength.

Not even a single chip rewarded his effort.

"I can get an air hammer, if you want one," a voice said.

Tate whirled. Standing three feet behind him and to one side was the workman in the overalls.

"Maybe I will," Tate said. "The officer isn't here now...."

"I know. Saw him go into Leary's Tavern down the street. He won't be back for an hour."

"Fine! Maybe now you can answer the question I asked?"

"Sure. You was right. There was nothin' there, and then suddenly there was this here statue."

Tate said, "Think the old lady saw it?"

"What makes you so interested?" the workman asked.

Hal Tate stopped to consider for a moment. He studied the workman's face while he did. Just a simple Joe, obviously not too much grey matter, but with as great a bump of curiosity as his own. Otherwise he wouldn't have remained....

But to get back to his own reasons: They were simple. Either he was crazy or he was not. Had the matter remained static, he knew it would have been an irritant, but one he would have gotten rid of. But since Norma and her father also insisted on the statue's permanence, then the whole business was one to be gone into.

Deeply....

"Because," Tate chose his words with care, "they're going to call me

crazy, and if I ask you to be my witness they'll say you are too."

"Hey!" There was alarm in the man's voice. "I don't want to get mixed up in nothing."

"Do you know who I am?" Tate asked.

"No. And I don't wanna know."

"Then you shouldn't have stayed. My name is Hal Tate and I'm an assistant County Prosecutor."

The workman's face settled into stolid lines of stubbornness. But Hal Tate knew it was the kind of stubbornness that would yield to the right kind of pressure. And he was quite prepared to bring it to bear. "Now, let's see your Social Security card and then you can go. I just want your name and address...."

The man hesitated only an instant, copied the information he wanted.

"I—I guess I better go now. Stalled long enough. The old lady'll think I stopped in for a couple beers. An' maybe I should have. I got an idea I'd of been better off."

Tate thought so, too, but said nothing. He watched the workman out of sight around the next corner, then got into his car and went home.

**T**HE PHONE'S ring awakened him.

It was Ray Whitley, the chairman of the County Committee.

"Hal, be down at the bank at three. There's a meeting and we'll want you to sit in. Policy."

Tate said he would and hung up. He showered, shaved and put on his new pin-striped grey suit. Norma liked him in grey, said his darkness in grey made him look distinguished. A last touch to the small-figured tie and he was on his way.

He had no court appearances today, so he would be free until lunch. With Norma. And by then he would have all the facts he wanted, facts he could

discuss with her.

The owner of the restaurant was having breakfast also and Hal joined him. He gave his order to the waitress and waited until his companion finished his coffee.

"Tom, how come they set that statue on Grant Road smack in the center like they did?"

"Dunno. Guess it was so long ago they never figured traffic would be so heavy. Sure makes it inconvenient, don't it?"

"It certainly has. I think I'll complain to the city fathers. Perhaps they'll move it to a park?" Tate said in a humorous vein.

He was amazed at the reaction. Tom's face turned livid. "Leave it be! It's been there for a damned long time and people don't mind it, so why should you?"

"I was just kidding, Tom."

"That kind of kidding ain't going to bring laughs, Tate."

"Well, now, Tom. It's nothing to get mad about."

"No? Well, I won't be the only one. You just keep your nose out of it!" With that, Tom picked up his dishes and stalked into the kitchen.

This horse, Hal decided, was getting harder and harder to ride.

By the time one o'clock rolled around, Hal Tate knew that he was in for the toughest and strangest fight of his career. He had spoken to a dozen different people, in a dozen sections of town. Not only did they know of the statue but they were all of the same mind. That he was a busybody and would do better to mind his own affairs. A couple even voiced hidden threats.

He was more than just thoughtful as he parked the car. He was a trifle frightened, and completely bewildered.

**N**ORMA WAS at their favorite table at the back of the restaurant.

Hal was surprised to see Tom standing at her side. The restaurant man looked up, saw Hal come in, said something hurriedly to the girl and moved away.

"Hi, honey," Tate said as he bent to brush her cheek with his lips, a usual caress.

She moved her head just enough so that his kiss hit nothing. There were spots of color in her usually pale cheeks, and the brightness in her eyes was recognizable as anger.

"Hal Tate! What in the world's the matter with you?"

He was slow to anger, being the kind of man who knew anger could, and usually did, lead to words and actions to be regretted. But the morning had not been one of light and content. He guessed the reason for her anger. And suddenly found his temper matching her's.

"Nothing's the matter with me! But something is the matter with this town! I think everyone's gone insane."

"Funny," she said witheringly. "But they all seem to have that opinion of you. Tom tells me you want to have the statue removed."

"Want to! I'm going to." He hadn't meant to say that, but she had badgered him into it. Now that he had said it, he knew he wasn't going to back out.

"Hal! I want you to forget the statue."

"Or... Go on. Finish it."

"All right. Or forget me."

His anger died. In its place there was a cold determination. "I won't forget either of you," he said. "What's more, I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

"They'll stop you."

He searched her lovely face, and for an instant thought he saw something far back in her eyes. Then it was gone, and an odd blankness took

its place. The words she'd just used echoed in his mind. "They'll stop you." How did she know that he had been asking people about the statue? How had any of them known he had been to the others? What fantastic and incredible deal had he fallen into?

He shook his head as if to clear it of his thoughts. "Honey, let's not quarrel. I'm hungry, gal. Let's eat."

Suddenly she shoved the chair back and stood facing him. "I was hungry too, Hal. But now that you're here..."

He said nothing.

"I think I'll eat alone. Somewhere else."

There was nothing to say.

**RAY WHITTLE**Y, the county committee chairman, was president of the Lawrenceburg Bank. He was also the local head of Rotary, and an active Moose and Mason. Most important to Hal Tate, he controlled the purse strings of the local political scene. His sponsorship meant winning the election.

He was seated alone at the conference table of his inner office. His grey eyes were cold and distant and he looked quickly up at Hal Tate as he entered, then turned his glance to the papers before him.

"Hello, Ray," Tate said. "Alone? I thought the others were to be here?"

"They were," Whittle said shortly.

Tate studied the florid, heavy face, let his eyes move down to the well-manicured fingers nervously tapping at the papers, and guessed something had happened that had to do with his election.

"And...?" Tate decided to let the other take the ball. He was sick of carrying it.

"They changed their minds, Hal. They think you're too impulsive. You know... The statue and all that."

"All what?"

Whittle cleared his throat. "Why, they seem to think that you won't make a good party man. You know that the statue means a lot to Lawrenceburg. Been here a devil of a long time. Landmark, and all that..."

"How long's it been here, Ray?"

"Oh..." Whittle hemmed, and paused a second. "I don't know. A hundred years or so."

"As old as the town, eh?"

"Why...yes. I suppose so."

"Who told you to crack down on me?"

Whittle became indignant. His face went a deeper shade of red and a vein pounded steadily at the side of his throat. "No one tells me anything. But I'm telling you! Keep your nose clean. Asking people questions will get you nowhere. The statue isn't harming anyone."

A perfectly reasonable request, Tate thought. And true. It wasn't bothering anyone. Just himself. And if they hadn't made such a to-do about it, he would have been content to forget the whole thing. Not now, though. He was going to get to the bottom of the mystery come what would. There were legal means he could use.

As if the other had read his mind: "No tricks, Hal. I'll put real pressure on."

"To hell with you!" Tate said coldly. "If you'd have left me alone... But you didn't. I'll go it alone."

Whittle stopped the restless tapping of his fingers. "It's your bed," he said.

**TATE** LET himself into his office, bolted the outer door and went into the inner office. His law books took up an entire wall case. He found the one he wanted and brought it over to his desk and fell to work reading it.

An hour later he sighed contentedly

and closed the book. He had found what he wanted, a way to get rid of the statue. What was more, it was a rather simple matter. All he needed was a single plaintiff.

The workman...

But when he went to the address given in the Social Security card, he discovered it was a rooming house. There had been a man by the name of Swolik living there, but he had moved out only this morning. Tate tried to read the reason in the heavy-boned, high-cheeked Slavic face before him, but met an empty stare and a shrug of the shoulders. The man who had answered to Tate's ring shrugged his shoulders again and closed the door softly in his face.

Tate walked slowly down the steps. The rooming house was but a block and a half from Grant Road and Eleventh. He decided to try something. The old lady—she might help, if he could find her.

Hal Tate leaned against the waist-high iron fence and peered intently at the granite thing in the middle of the street. If it was supposed to represent a human figure, the sculptor had not succeeded very well, though there was a vague resemblance to the human anatomy. Altogether, it had the formless appearance of a dream seen in montage.

Hours went by. He didn't want to leave because he had the feeling that just when he left, she would appear. He noticed that whoever passed him turned to give him nasty glances. Some even made remarks.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, she was moving toward him with odd, tripping steps, a market basket held close to her side. He stepped in front of her and smiled disarmingly.

No beating about the bush here. He put on his best court manner.

"Madam, I trust you remember me?"

"Perfectly. You were the young man who was having the argument with the police officer last night." She spoke with a voice as prim as her manner.

"Yes, ma'am. I've gone to a lot of trouble hoping I would see you again."

"Why?"

"I think you saw the same thing I did last night. Did you?"

"If you mean did I see that perfectly ridiculous piece of granite come out of the ground, I did."

"You did?"

"Would you rather that I didn't?"

"No! No, I'm perfectly content. You see, I was beginning to think I was going crazy. Everyone I've mentioned it to acts as if I had lost my mind. There were others beside myself whom I felt sure saw the same thing I did. You and a workman. I looked up the workman, but it seemed he had to move suddenly. I want some evidence—"

"Evidence? Do you want me to appear in court?"

"Would you if I asked it?"

"Depends on what you're trying to prove. You haven't said yet."

He took her into his confidence. "Ma'am, the whole town insists this monstrosity has been here for as long as they can remember. Pressure is being put on me to forget what I saw."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But I think if you'll help me, we'll soon find out."

Her face fell into lines of concentration. Her under lip worried at the upper and her eyes searched a phantom spot somewhere above Tate's head.

"I won't commit myself, young man. Suppose you tell me your plan?"

He did as she asked, nor did he leave anything to the imagination. For a long moment, she showed indecision. Then a small smile broke her lips and



her eyes twinkled up at him.

"You can subpoena me whenever you wish," she said.

JUDGE DAVID Brightly had the reputation of being a stickler for proper procedure. He was also known to lean far to the right in matters of precedence. It was on that fact Hal Tate based his case.

It had taken him two days to get a hearing. Now he was ready. The bailiff opened the door and he was greeted by a wave of hostile stares. He looked about in amazement. It seemed that the whole of Lawrenceburg had turned out. The silence which greeted his arrival fell to pieces. The sound of whispering voices filled the large chamber.

As soon as Hal Tate appeared, the clerk arose and called the court to order, but his words were drowned out in a further outbreak of whispering. The severe features of Judge Brightly became even more so, as he hammered with his gavel.

"There will be silence in this court! Further talk will compel me to take strict measures. Now then, clerk, what is the case before the court?"

After the clerk had his say, the Judge nodded for Tate to state his case.

Hal made it brief: "There is no case, Your Honor," he said. "The plaintiff, Miss Minerva Price, has brought before the office of the County Prosecutor a complaint in respect to the statue in the middle of Grant Road between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues. Her complaint reads that the aforementioned statue is unsightly, an obstruction and a hazard. The Law is quite clear, Your Honor. Page 465, section—"

"If I may interrupt, counselor?" the Judge broke in. "May I ask why the

County Prosecutor's office has taken an interest in the case?"

"I don't think the question is in order, Your Honor."

"The Court will decide what is in order," Judge Brightly said sharply. "The statue in question has been a landmark of historical significance for generations."

"The Law is clear in this matter!" Tate said again.

JUDGE BRIGHTLY'S face paled, then became flushed. He controlled himself with an obvious effort. When he spoke again, his words dripped with acid effect: "The Law in no case is inflexible, counselor. It is always interpretive. I did not think it would be necessary to remind you of that which is common knowledge to first year law students. In this matter I am of the opinion that the wishes of the majority of the townspeople are of greater importance than the desires of a single individual. Complaint denied."

A tidal wave of sound swelled to drown the last words. Judge Brightly hammered with the gavel, but to no avail. Hal Tate turned to Minerva Price, grimaced bitterly, picked up his unopened brief case and marched from the room. The catcalls of the spectators followed him until the doors closed out the sound. He waited for the woman to appear.

He took her arm and moved swiftly down the hall. He did not want her subjected to further derision. He drove her home, and they talked during the drive.

"I don't think Judge Brightly was fair at all. He didn't give you a chance," she said.

"I won't say I didn't expect it."

"Well, I didn't!" Then, "It made me angry! The crowd that was there; the grins they wore; the whole thing

seemed to be a setting for a carnival."

"Miss Price," Tate tried to be gentle in his reminder, "perhaps it was wrong of me to bring you into this. The ridicule they shower me with I can toss off. But the people of a small town, and Lawrenceburg is not large, can be very nasty toward a helpless woman."

Spots of anger glowed in her cheeks. "I'm not done," she said. "I'll write to the paper. Surely the press will take an interest at least."

"I'm positive it won't do any good. We'll just have to give up. The whole town's against us, including its press."

"You may give up, but Minerva Price doesn't that easily. I'll keep writing and talking till—" She colored suddenly, conscious of the strong words she almost used.

He patted her arm. "Thanks! I needed that. Well. Here we are."

"Let's talk for a while," she said. "Come up and I'll brew a pot of coffee, Mr. Tate, and we can talk a while."

HE NOTICED that the furniture and appointments of the living room where she had left him were not new. But there was a feeling of comfort that made up for the lack of modernity. She appeared shortly, wheeling a tea table. A modern coffee-maker was flanked by cups, saucers, creamer and sugar bowl. And to one side a pecan torte shone brown in the sunlight.

"I thought you might like it," she said. "People tell me I bake well."

"People don't use the right word," Tate said as he bit deeply of the cake. "Superbly is the correct and proper word."

Her old eyes fairly danced with pleasure. "How nice to hear a compliment. But much as I like them, I'd rather get back to what we were dis-

cussing in the car."

He finished the last of his torte, took a last sip of coffee and arranged his thoughts. Presently he said: "We are faced with an incredible and fantastic fact. A whole city has been hypnotized by an entity, or being, or whatever you wish to call this supernatural force."

"I don't believe it!" she said.

He shook off her reply. "Then there are four of us who are crazy."

"I don't believe that either."

"One or the other," he pointed out. "Or, if you like, we four have been the ones who were hypnotized."

"Pfah! And I can also say fiddlesticks. I don't fall under spells that easy. I saw the stone thing shoot out from the pavement. There is no one who can convince me otherwise."

"I did too," he said. "Now. Let's ask questions, even if we can't get the answers. Why did the townspeople get so set against us because we wanted the statue moved? They had previously thought me queer that I couldn't remember the existence of the statue, but not until I made an issue of moving it did they get angry. Why?"

"I can't say." She poured a fresh cup for him while waiting his answer.

"Mass hypnotism could be a true answer. I don't know how or why four of us were excepted, unless we were so close to the miracle of the statue's birth. But I'm only guessing wildly now."

"I have an idea," she said. "Let's say the statue disappears during the night. I should think that whoever put it there, or made it appear, would be quite worried about it."

"It could be done," Tate said. "I know it isn't heavy, despite its size. I leaned against it and it moved. But it's made of an incredibly hard stone."

"Your car is too small but I have a station wagon which I never use, and

which would be perfect for what we need. Do you think the two of us could manage it?"

"I can't think of anyone who would help us," Tate replied. "Are you willing, Miss Price?"

"And able, I hope," she smiled cheerfully. And poured a third cup of coffee for him, and gave him the last of the torte.

## THE LAWRENCEBURG BUGLE

featured a three-column spread on the theft of the statue. They had put a special writer on it. Tate read aloud to Miss Price: "...The time of the theft is not known, nor in fact is much else known. Chief of Police Nash says, and we quote, 'We have a definite lead and expect a solution within the next twenty-four hours.' So much for Police Chief Nash.

"The facts are these, however. Sometime between midnight and this morning, the historic landmark which stood on Grant Road between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, was stolen. The disparity of time is accounted for by the fact that this neighborhood has no patrolman after one A. M. and therefore the thieves knew they had five hours of safety. The very height and weight of the statue is the clue which makes more than one thief a reasonable certainty.

"Mayor Dodds, when reached at a meeting this morning, said, and we quote, 'Every effort will be made to apprehend the culprits. The Chief of Police has been given full authority to handle this as he sees fit, and I have issued an emergency order for extra patrolmen to aid in the search. The City Council joins me in assuring the citizens of Lawrenceburg that we will not rest until the thieves are brought to justice and the statue restored to its rightful place...'

"Despite the optimistic note struck by the Mayor and the City Council,

the truth is there are no clues as to either the whereabouts of the statue, or the men who stole it...."

Miss Price giggled in delight. "Wouldn't they just pass into a tizzy if they knew where it was?"

"Tizzy." Tate replied with a smile, "is a neat way of putting it. I think I'll run along, Miss Price. And I also think it would be the better part of discretion not to be seen together again for a while. They might add two and two and get four. Let's not give them the chance."

He patted her arm in understanding. He saw the pink come to her cheeks at his gesture. "You're a pretty good sport, Minerva," he said gallantly. "More than some I know."

"I was beginning to wonder when you would stop being so formal. It doesn't become members of a conspiracy such as ours to act as if we needed calling cards. And whatever you do, don't stop telling me how much you like me. It's been so long...."

He blew her a kiss in farewell, and felt it was worth it just to see her blush....

HE WAS GOING through the afternoon edition of the *Lawrenceburg Bugle* when a knock sounded at the door.

"Door's open. Come in."

It was Norma Watts' father. "Hello, Hal...." Watts paused, drew a large handkerchief from a pocket and wiped his forehead. "Thought I'd stop in and see how things were with you."

"What things?"

Watts said nothing for a while. Tate felt the other's nervousness and guessed the reason for it. Someone had sent him over to talk to him. He knew Norma's father well enough to know that pressure had been brought to bear on him.

"It's about you and Norma, Hal. She's very unhappy about the whole thing. She loves you, Hal. You ought to know that."

"Let's say I do. What does she want of me?"

"She wants you to confess you took the statue. I think she loves you enough to forgive you. And now I said what she wants, I'll talk for myself. Don't be a fool, Hal. You got the world by the tail; I was talking to Ray Whittley yesterday and he feels bad about the whole thing—"

"Seems that the whole town feels bad. But I'm still a convicted man. I'm crazy, and now I stole the statue. They're sure of it and so they bring pressure to bear through Norma. Well, it's no good."

"You're not talking?"

"No. And you can go back and tell Ray and Norma that. I'm not angry with them, and truthfully I know exactly why they've sent you. But it isn't you I want to see or hear from. Tell them I feel sure the statue will be returned and everything will be all right. In due time."

Watts knew he had failed. He turned without a word and went out. Hal Tate continued to sit, as if waiting for something else to happen.

**T**HE MAN was dressed simply and spoke with an air of reserve: "Miss Price, I hope you will forgive this intrusion."

Minerva Price nodded and waited for the other to continue. But her hand remained on the door jamb and her slender body blocked his entrance. "What can I do for you?" she said.

"Help me. My name is of no consequence, nor does it matter who or what I am. I am a stranger in town and am interested only in getting certain information. I have talked with other people of this town and they have told me there are only two, a

Miss Price and a Mr. Tate, who can help me. That is why I have come to you."

She continued to block his entrance. Her eyes held his own with an odd defiance, as if she knew his mission. "You talk but don't say anything, mister."

His face became very still and very guarded. The only thing that moved was the light in his eyes. She hadn't noticed them before. Now she realized she had never seen eyes so dark, so full of strange lights, so deep. For a second his face seemed to waver, get out of focus. And suddenly panic took hold of her. But only for a second. The next second she forced her eyes away from his, and when she looked again the eyes were merely brown, and a trifle hurt-looking.

"I think I've made a mistake," he said. "I'm sorry."

She watched him out of sight before she turned and closed the door. But once the door was closed, she felt as if she had been through something physically tiring. Don't be silly, she told herself. You're imagining things now. He was just a man, a stranger, maybe a policeman. But she knew he was something else, though what, she couldn't say. Perhaps Hal Tate would know.

She could feel the tiredness in his voice, could hear the unvoiced despair. "Hal? What happened?"

His voice was low: "They're getting worried, Minerva. Now they're trying to get me through Norma. They know I'll break down if they continue."

"Don't do it," her briskly calm voice was a slap at his weakness. "They've come to see me too. A man. Perfect stranger. But there was something strange about his visit. He never told me what he wanted. And I swear he tried to hypnotize me."

"What? What! Who was he, what did he look like?"

"I can't remember. He had dark eyes, and was dressed in ordinary clothes. And now that I think of it, it was strange. He said nothing aloud, but I felt as if he were trying to tell me things he wanted to say, without words."

What she said seemed not to make sense, yet Hal Tate understood her perfectly. She could hear his sudden excitement. His voice crackled: "Don't go anywhere, Minerva. Stay where you are. I don't think this being intends harm, but I don't know. Does he know about me?"

"Yes. He mentioned your name."

"Then he's on his way to see me. I think the climax to this affair will soon be reached. I— 'Bye. There was a knock on the door just now—"

"If it's him, call me the second he leaves, Hal," she said.

The sound of the breaking connection came an instant later, but she knew he had heard her.

**H**IS SMILE faded at sight of the man who came in. He had not expected Ray Whittley.

"What's the matter, Hal?" Whittley said. "You look kind of down." He dropped heavily into the chair beside the desk and took a cigar from his breast pocket, bit the end from it and lit it. He looked steadily at Tate through the bluish clouds of smoke.

"Now, why should I look down?" Tate asked. "I feel fine. Better than most people. I've got no worries."

"I'm glad to hear that, Hal. I thought maybe we might talk."

"I can't stop you."

Whittley smiled. He held the cigar away from him and looked at the burning end. It was a familiar gesture. He had done just that very thing the day he had told Tate the committee wanted him to run for County Prosecutor. "Hal, how about declaring peace?"

"Let's say I know what you're talking about, just for the moment. What are your terms?"

Whittley continued to regard the cigar end with morbid fascination. "Not too many. I'll call off the watchdogs, put you back on the primary, forget the whole thing. Even do this: Tell the committee you'll play ball. All I want you to do is see to it that the statue is back on Grant Road by morning."

"And if I say no?"

This time Whittley looked at Tate. His eyes were hooded so that only slits of grey showed, like bits of sparkling ice between the lids. "I'll break you, Tate. I'll make you wish you weren't born. I'll get you disbarred, and I'll see to it you can't even get a janitor's job."

The phone suddenly rang, startling both of them. Hal lifted the receiver. All expression was wiped from his voice at the sound of the voice at the other end. It was the unmistakable one of Ray Whittley!

"Hal?"

"Yes?" Tate made himself non-committal, talking in a tone little above a whisper. He made sure the phone was pressed close against his ear.

"Ray Whittley, Hal. You alone?"

"No, but it's all right. What do you want?"

"I'll give you anything you want, Hal. Anything. We'll run you for States Attorney, instead of County Prosecutor. We'll forget the whole thing if you'll come across. Where's the statue?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Call me later."

"Hal, we're through being nice. I'm warning you."

"I said call me later. Or better, don't call me at all. I'll call you."

"Okay, Hal, but don't bother unless you're ready to call it quits."

Tate hung the phone up with deliberation.

erate care. He was smiling again when he turned to face the man in the chair.

"Tell me," he said, "who are you?"  
"You have gone crazy," the other said. "What kind of question is that to ask?"

"Do you know who that was on the phone?"

"How should I know?" And what difference does it make? We've talked enough. I'm leaving now. But I'm not through, Hal."

"You're not leaving now, though you may be through. I asked you something, and I want to know the answer. Who are you?"

The brown eyes were suddenly like twin beams of powerful lights boring into his own. Brown eyes? Whittley's were grey. This man's eyes were brown with flickering lights in their depths, far back. No! Don't look so deeply into them! Look at something else, the strong, hooked nose, the sardonic mouth, the jutting chin, anything. But don't look too deeply into his eyes...

Hal Tate blinked his eyes. The room was empty.

HE OPENED the drawer with shaking fingers, lifted the bottle from the bottom of it, poured a stiff drink into a glass and drank it without using a chaser. The shock of the whiskey made him shiver, but it cleared the numbness from his brain.

He knew now that he and Minerva were up against a human being. This man was real enough, but had powers of hypnotism so great they were beyond belief. He took another drink, a smaller one this time. Now he felt better.

He sat down and pondered on the strange visit. Something about it struck him as being strange. Here was a man who could hypnotise someone into thinking they were talking to,

were looking at a familiar voice and figure, yet couldn't force out of a man's mind the thing he wanted. There was only one answer. Since Hal and Minerva had moral right on their side, he could not force them to divulge the secret of the statue.

Suddenly Hal Tate knew he had to see the statue again.

THE YOUNGSTER smiled up at the man with a pleased look. "When am I going to get the Hopalong Cassidy suit?"

The man patted the tow head. "Very soon. Now, tell me again what happened?"

"Gee. I was late. I knew mom'd be mad but when I saw this man go around behind the house like he was sneaking, I thought maybe if I followed I'd catch him breaking in and I'd get a cop. I ain't afraid."

"I know that, son. You're a brave boy, that's why you followed him."

"Betcha! So like I said, he goes around the back and I follow him. And there's old lady Price standing by the garage. He goes right up to her and they talk for a minute and pretty soon she opens the garage and he goes in and takes out the station wagon..."

"They were able to lift the statue into it?"

"Gosh, yes! I thought it was heavy, but not from the way they moved it, it wasn't. Then I sneaked up and hooked a ride on the spare tire and they come right to Lawton Park. I jumped off and sneaked into some bushes while they take the statue out and lug him on the grass and just set him there. Then they got back in the station wagon and rode away... Gee! Did I catch it when I got home. An' not from mom. From my dad! When do I get the Hopalong suit, mister?"

"If I give you the money, do you think your mother will mind?" the

man asked.

The boy thought for a moment. "Guess not. She'll ask a lot of questions, though."

"And I'm sure you're bright enough to give her the right answer. Just tell her you saw it in the paper and told a man you knew where the statue was and he gave you the money."

"You mean it was in the papers. Gee! I kinda remember mom and dad talking about it last night. I was looking at the television. Yea, Hoppy!"

The man looked startled at the sudden cowboy yell. Then he smiled again, reached into his pocket and pulled out a greenback. "Here, son. I think this will buy the suit and a few other things you might want."

The boy looked at the twenty-dollar bill with awe. When he looked up, the man was gone....

**H**AL TATE sat on the park bench and watched the people. He had been sitting so for an hour. Not ten feet away the granite statue gleamed whitely in the afternoon sun. No one paid the slightest attention to it. He felt rather than saw someone sit down beside him.

"Clever of you, Tate."

Tate turned slowly. He saw a strong hooked nose, wide-set brown eyes, a jutting chin, dark clothes.

"But not too clever," Tate said. "You found it."

"Oh, I would have found it eventually anyway. But to put it in a park where thousands of people are bound to see it. And not one remember it."

"I've been wondering about that," Tate said. "Why?"

"I think the answer is they associate it with the street on which I put it. When I was forced to use hypnotism, the force was directed in a certain channel. They don't recognise it because it doesn't exist for them ex-

cept on Grant Road."

"How did you find it? Did Miss Price talk?"

"No. I can't force people to talk who have right on their side, and since you and the old lady were not in the field of my mass-spell, whatever the reason for that, I couldn't make you talk, though I could cast an immediate spell over you. The boy was the medium I used. Children have no concepts of right or wrong. It was mere good luck. He was on his way home the night you and Miss Price kidnapped the statue. He was riding on the rear tire and came to the park with you."

Tate shook his head. He had not thought about the youngster. But perhaps it was just as well.

"Mind telling me what this is all about, who you are, why you put the statue there?"

"Come with me," the man said.

They stood by the granite thing and looked at it.

"What's it supposed to represent?" Tate asked.

"The most fabulous thing in my world," the man replied. "I found it but had to hide it for a while. There was no place there so I went into this dimension. Now I can bring it back and get the reward it offers. Fortunately."

"Why fortunately?"

"Another day and it would have been too late. I would have been forced to strong measures then."

"Well, that's good. But you know what I think? I think you're just ribbing me. This statue might be worth something, but not in any other world but this. I don't believe you in anything except this power of mass hypnotism you have. And since you can't hypnotise me, what would you do if I said I won't let you take the statue? I think maybe I can stop you, physically. Or at least put up a fight."

"You would be making a mistake."

"Why? Do you have a gun?"

"I assure you one isn't needed. Look..." His hand shot out and took hold of Hal Tate.

That was all.

But suddenly Tate was high in the air. A huge face fully twenty feet from chin to forehead was before him. A voice that was like the roar of Niagara boomed at him: "You see now. No one else can. This is what I am in my world. I could not come to this world as I am..."

The green earth felt good and Hal Tate pressed his feet more firmly into the grass. It had been a wild dream, he was sure. Or was it. He couldn't tell, now. The dark eyes regarding him were smiling and so were the sardonic lips. Had he been lifted high in the air by giant fingers; had he seen that Gargantuan face? Was this man a giant from another world?

The man turned and placed both hands on the statue. Words came to Tate: "Goodbye, Earthman."

**H**AL TATE blinked his eyes. He felt his lips tremble and an uncontrollable shiver took him. There was nothing before him but the green grass and trees. Of statue and stranger, nothing. He turned and walked back to his car, his mind in a daze.

The phone rang just as he got to his inner office. He lifted it with a mechanical gesture. It was Ray Whitley.

"Hal?"

"Yes," he whispered. And thought, now it's all over. Washed up. That's what Whitley's calling about.

"Where the devil have you been? I've been trying to get hold of you all morning. Don't forget the meeting this afternoon. Just wanted to make sure you remembered. Policy committee."

"Meeting? Policy? Uh..."

"Three o'clock. Don't forget, Hal."

The line went dead. No more crisp sound of voice. Suddenly, Tate felt hunger. He looked at his watch. One o'clock. Time for lunch. He wasn't aware that he was entering Tom's restaurant.

"Hi, Hal!"

He looked up. The dark-skinned owner waved his hand in greeting from where he was leaning over Norma Watts at the table far back in the restaurant.

"You're late. Norma's been waiting for hours, she says."

The girl offered her cheek and he kissed it lightly, before he knew what he was doing.

"H'm." She gave him a sidelong look. "If that's the way you're going to act while courting, what's our married life going to be like?"

"Married life?" He was bewildered.

This time, her eyes turned serious. "Is something wrong, Hal?"

"No. I mean... Norma, tell me this. Do you remember me telling you about a statue I saw in the middle of Grant Road?"

"Hal Tate! Are you drunk? Statue in the middle of Grant Road! What are you talking about?"

He smiled. He knew now that everything was going to be all right. "Honey," he said, "would you mind if I divided my attention between you and a Miss Minerva Price. Just for tonight?"

This time, Norma looked bewildered.

"She makes the most wonderful tortes. And I know she'd love to teach you how to make them. After all, if you want to keep this man happily married—"

"Hal—"

He closed her mouth with a kiss, and as her lips returned his avid caress, his mind slowly dropped its memories of the past hours—and it was as if they had never been.



# FROM HIDDEN WORLDS

*By Milton Lesser*

**This silent watching was worse than open attack. In this war of nerves who would win: mute aliens or imaginative Earthmen?**



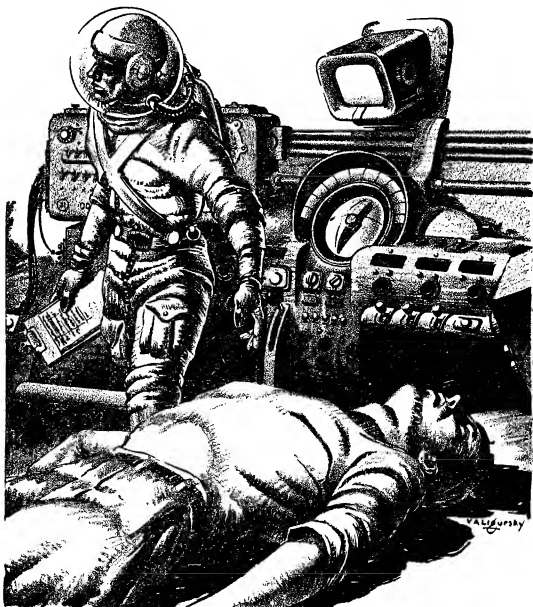
**J**EREMY sipped the drink mostly to taste what it was like. Foamy McGann, the stewardess, now obliged him with her company at his table.

But the routine of passenger life aboard the starcoach held no further fascination for Jeremy. Everyone aboard had his own particular reason for going to Sosiphon, everyone from

blustering Philip Ackeroyd who was to be the new governor of Sosiphon Two, down to Jeremy himself, new professor of extranthropology.

Now he nodded absently as the head waiter handed him a note.

"A secret love tryst below decks, Professor Jenks?" Foamy McGann said, smiling. "Honest, you surprise me."



"Too bad we can't give 'em a decent burial," Jenks said. "But I guess the dead don't care!"

Jeremy became mildly annoyed every time the stewardess made fun of him. He said, very seriously, "Hardly. You're the only woman aboard ship I call by her first name."

Foamy was still smiling. "My first name is Leatrice."

"Oh. By her nickname, then."

It turned out to be a note from Bart Dobson, the astrogator. But Jeremy found none of Dobson's usual wisecracks concerning Foamy, and he frowned. The note sounded urgent.

*Doc—Come forward. Hurry. Bart—*

Jeremy got up. "Excuse me, Foamy. I've got to go forward. Shall I order you another drink?"

Foamy stretched, stood up. "Don't bother, Jeremy. Think I'll dance a round or two with Fred Parker over there." She gestured to the blond haired young man sitting alone at a nearby table.

Jeremy winced. Why did that always bother him? He had to admit it was Foamy's job, among other things, to dance with the passengers. He also had to admit that Foamy and Fred Parker made a nice couple. Well, five months confined within a ship could do this to a man, and wait until he got his hands on some of those artifacts of the Sosiphonic sub-culture....

He shrugged, watched for a moment as Foamy reached the other table and sat down, then remembered Bart's note and hustled on forward.

He shrugged impatiently at the door, repeated his name three times before he got any response.

Then: "Oh, Doc." The voice sounded relieved. "Come on in."

Jeremy heard the buzzer which activated the lock, and in a moment he stood inside the control room.

Bart Dobson sat facing the controls, his back to Jeremy. Jack Cranshaw, the second astrogator, lay

sprawled on a cot, a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his hand. "Have a snort," he suggested, rocking back and forth slightly.

"He shouldn't—" Jeremy began.

"Take it easy, Doc," Dobson said. "I've been tempted sure as hell myself, because then I could sit back in a fog and let whatever's going to happen, happen."

"What's that?"

"I dunno. I just know what's going to make things happen. Come here."

Jeremy started to advance and Cranshaw reached up from his cot clumsily. As Jeremy sidestepped, the bottle of whiskey fell, spilling all over the floor.

"Now look what you done, Doc," Cranshaw mumbled thickly. "You shoulda stuck to exnathro-up— Aw, g'way...."

"...over here, Doc," Dobson was saying. "The foreport."

Jeremy looked. "What am I supposed to see? We appear to be on course. We're skirting the Sagittarian cloud now, heading across the front of the dark Ophiuchus nebula, and then on to Sosiphos. Right?"

"Yeah," Dobson agreed. "But look a little closer at the Ophiuchus baby. Yeah, the middle. What do you see?"

"Hmm," Jeremy stared. "A tiny point of light. It looks like it might be a star."

"It's not," said Dobson. "There isn't any window in the Ophiuchus nebula, Doc. You know—just a dark mess of gas and cosmic dust, a door to the center of the Galaxy through which we ain't allowed to look."

**T**HAT was true. Here at the fringes of the Sagittarian swarm and Ophiuchus lay Sosiphos, Earth's outpost on the frontier of the unknown. Beyond Sagittarius and Ophiuchus was the heart of the Galaxy, curtained by

the swarm and by the nebula, unplumbed by man.

"All right," Jeremy nodded. "It's not a star. What is it?" Oddly—he did not know why—he was frightened.

"Saship!" Cranshaw cried. "Saship, that's what it is!"

"What did he say?" Jeremy demanded.

For answer, Dobson swung a scope over the foreport. "We first saw it six hours ago, and now it's coming closer. Take a look."

Jeremy peered within the scope, swung it across the great blackness of Ophiuchus.

"You see it, Doc? You see it?"

He did. It was not very big and it was round, utterly round, gleaming against the darkness. About its equator was a string of tiny circles, brighter than the rest, and even as he looked it grew appreciably in the scope.

"Saship!" Cranshaw cried, stupidly, and suddenly the thick strung-together words took on meaning for Jeremy.

"Yes," Dobson said, "it's a ship. Where no ship can be, Doc. . . ." Dobson licked his dry lips. "Only it's round. No Earth ship is round, Doc. They're all built tapering, like this one. *So—that thing out there isn't an Earth ship.* It's from someplace else. It's not from this side of Sagittarius and Ophiuchus. . . ."

He was trembling now as he continued: "I shut the radio both ways; we'll speak neither to Earth nor to Sosiphon, and we won't get anything in from them."

"Why did you do that?" Jeremy turned away from the scope.

Dobson sighed. "Take a look at this—the official history of space travel, Eddson's *An Account of Man's First Five Hundred Years in Space*. I know the book well, practically have it memorized. The officials of Milky Way Starcoach see to that.

We got no choice. We have to know this book backwards and forwards, especially the last chapter. Here—" Dobson reached into his breast pocket, dug out a much dog-eared, paper-bound volume. "I've been reading it in my spare time, brushing up so I could pass the periodic written test when I get back to Earth. Only now it doesn't matter. I won't get back to Earth, won't even reach Sosiphon. Read the last part, Doc."

Jeremy read. By the fifth page he could imagine why Cranshaw was drunk, why Dobson brooded, by the tenth something was gnawing restlessly at his insides. He forgot all about Sosiphon Two and its University. By the end of the chapter he had even forgotten Dobson. He just sat there, staring straight ahead at the bright spot which could not be in Ophiuchus and yet was, which now showed a tiny disc even without the scope.

"Saship!" said Cranshaw.

"FIRST," DOBSON told Jeremy,

"we'll have to stop our flight, right now. Like this." He stood up and adjusted some dials on the wall. When he returned to his seat he was smiling grimly.

Jeremy said, "Why did we have to stop?"

"Use your head, Doc. We can't go on to Sosiphon. That alien ship might follow, might learn the location of Earth's colony. That might lead, ultimately, to the discovery of Earth's whole far-flung star-system. We can't high-tail it back to Earth for the same reason. Ditto, we can't change course and head for any of the other colonies."

"Umm," Jeremy considered. "Yes. There are two hundred billion stars, more or less, in the Galaxy. Perhaps one out of three has planets. Of those, maybe one out of a hundred can support life. Not many, but it still leaves

millions in the Galaxy."

Dobson nodded. "That's it exactly, Doc. If we don't head for any of the Earth planets, that alien culture might go another thousand years without finding them. It might go forever, which is what Earth Government wants. There's no telling if they'll be friendly or hostile. So—"

"Yes," Jeremy mused. "And what can an unarmed passenger ship like this one do?"

"We have one gun up front," Dobson told him. "Just a small job, but it's pretty deadly at close range."

Jeremy nodded, looked again through the foreport, saw the spherical ship hovering off in the void, the size of a kid's marble held at arm's length. "It looks like they had the same idea," he observed.

Dobson scratched his head. "What do you mean?"

"They've stopped, too. They're waiting for us to make the first move."

"Nuts, Doc. I won't do anything until they—"

"Exactly. Nor will they. So we'll just sit back and relax, thanking our lucky stars this ship is a damned good balanced terrarium. Then we'll see."

"You hope," Dobson told him. "We might not get a chance to see anything. How do you know they ain't armed to the teeth?"

"I don't, but if they are, they've already had enough time to knock us out of space."

"Nope. Not necessarily so, Doc. Maybe they think we can lead them to the home planet, to Earth. Think of that. What the hell's one stinking ship when you come busting through a dark nebula to a new half of the Galaxy?"

**J**EREMY stood up and paced back and forth for a time. But the foreport drew his gaze like a magnet, and

soon he stood in front of it, eyes riveted on the tiny mib of a spaceship hovering not too far off in the void. "All right, we have several alternatives," Jeremy said. "We can shoot right on to Sosiphon, we can return to Earth, or we can go on to one of the other colonies. But all three are out."

"Damn right. First place, there's an old law against it if we're found out, meant for the old military ships and punishable by death. I guess that means we run away. We just keep on going until—"

Jeremy shook his head. "That's silly. This starcoach is no speed demon. They could run rings around us. But we could radio for help."

"Can't do that, Doc. It's against the old laws, too. They might be able to get a directional beam on our space radio. Then they'd know Sosiphon's location as sure as if we led them there. So—so maybe we oughta unload our pea-shooter and try to blast them. Maybe...."

Jeremy didn't even ponder over this one. He said, "One little gun? It would be pointless, because we'll have to assume they have more until we know better. We'll just have to stay put, right here, gawking out the port and watching them—God knows how long—until something happens."

"So what happens then, Doc? A day passes, a week, and they don't do anything. We can't just stay here."

Jeremy chuckled softly. "I wasn't thinking in terms of days or weeks at all."

"Oh, you mean just a couple of hours?"

"No. I was thinking in terms of months or years, all the rest of our lives, perhaps. I don't know that there's anything else we can do except stay right here. Maybe forever."

Jeremy felt strange saying it. That amounted to an exile in space, con-

fined within the walls of the starcoach, cramped, unmoving, fed and given air by the hydroponic units arearships. It meant never setting foot on Earth again, not seeing the sun, not hearing the hundred little Earth sounds which you take so much for granted....

Dobson seemed a bit dazed. "I tell you what, Doc. Let me think. I can't answer that now. Just give me a chance to figure things out for a while. Meanwhile, we'll do as you say. We won't move, not an inch. We'll just sit on a bunch of nothing out here and watch that alien ship.

"But do me a favor? Don't tell anyone. I'll close the observation dome...for repairs...notify the passengers of a minor breakdown which'll delay us for a while. That's why we're not moving, see? But don't let the cat out of the bag, Doc."

Jeremy nodded, shook hands solemnly, got up and left the control room.

WHEN HE reached the dining room, he smiled. He'd better learn how to dance that Galaxy Special, he might spend all the rest of his life here on the starcoach. Foamy McGann, of course, could be a more than pleasant diversion, provided Fred Parker didn't turn her head permanently in some other direction.

He found the two of them dancing, and suddenly he was doing something he had never done before in his life. He stepped up boldly behind Parker, tapped one of the broad shoulders. "I'd like to finish this dance with Miss McGann," he said.

"Miss—oh, Foamy! Sure, Prof, if it's okay with the lady, it's fine with me."

"Fine!" Foamy scolded him in mock severity. "I thought you said you liked dancing with me, Fred."

And then Jeremy took the girl in

his arms and watched Parker drift away to one of the tables. They danced, Foamy's head nestling very close to his own. About the only thing Jeremy could find wrong with the dance was the fact that it did not last long enough. Suddenly, with no warning at all, the music stopped, and Jeremy found himself holding Foamy against his chest, not dancing.

She smiled, said: "Wake up, Jeremy. There's no more music, so won't you let me out of this bear-hug like a nice professor?"

Jeremy reddened and let her go. Then he was aware of a voice, metallic, coming from the loudspeaker. "This is Astrogator Dobson," the voice said. "We have stopped our flight three weeks out from the Sosisphon System. We are now drifting slightly, midway between the Swarm and the Ophiuchus Nebula."

Jeremy was aware of a rustling buzz of conversation all about him: it definitely was not ordinary for a starcoach to stop in mid-flight. Milky Way's ships were slow enough as it was, and this would only be an unnecessary delay.

Nearby, Jeremy heard Philip Ackeroyd, the new Earth governor for Sosisphon Two, talking to his wife. "Don't worry, my dear. It can be nothing serious. But still, they have a hell of a nerve stopping in mid-space like this. I'll be late for taking office...."

Dobson's metallic voice again: "Technical difficulties make it impossible for anyone to enter the observation dome until further notice. Radio communication to or from Earth, Sosisphon or any of the colonies is impossible. You will be notified further...."

Jeremy wondered if Bart Dobson had gone too far. The rustling buzz became an angry buzz, and he could hear Philip Ackeroyd's booming voice

in particular. "...gal, that's what! I don't know what game this Dobson thinks he's playing, my dear, but I sure as hell intend to find out..."

Again, Dobson: "Passengers are to be confined to their staterooms, the library, the dining room and the recreation hall until further notice. That is all..."

"Confined, my foot!" Ackeroyd cried. "Confined to my quarters, to the library—"

Fred Parker grinned. "Whatsamatter, Governor? Don't you read?"

Ackeroyd ignored him. "My dear, if you will excuse me, I'm going forward right now."

**H**E GOT up and waddled toward the doorway, a little fat man with a booming voice. Foamy told Jeremy, "I don't know what this is all about, and I have a hunch you do, but never mind. Excuse me!"

In a moment she stood, arms akimbo, between Ackeroyd and the doorway which led forward. "It won't even take a minute, Mr. Ackeroyd," she said. "In fact, it will take no time at all, because you're not going. You've heard the orders, sir."

"Orders!" His face got very red. "Of course you're joking, Miss McGann. No one on this ship can order me around."

Foamy stood her ground, said nothing. The fat figure advanced until less than an arm's length separated them, and then Foamy spoke: "The only way you can get through that door, Mr. Ackeroyd, is if you hit a woman. Now, do you go back to your table while I lock this door, or..."

Everyone was very quiet, and Jeremy knew that any authority which the ship's officers had would depend pretty much on what happened here. If Ackeroyd got his way, authority would be a hollow word with no meaning, and they couldn't afford anarchy

now. The same would be true if anyone came to Foamy's aid; she must do this thing herself.

A chair scraped against the floor, and in the silence which followed, Ackeroyd's booming voice seemed to emerge from an amplifier.

"I've had enough, Miss McGann. Too much. Just get out of my way, young lady—or I'll push you right on ahead of me!"

Jeremy watched as Foamy leaned forward. She spoke earnestly, in a low voice, and only Ackeroyd could hear her. When she finished, the fat man stalked back to his table. Foamy turned, reached into a pocket of her blouse, came up with a key, swung the big door shut and locked it. She put the key back into her pocket and began to whistle. By the time she reached Jeremy's table, everyone was talking again, and there was enough laughter in the room to convince Jeremy that the first crisis had been met successfully.

**F**OAMY sat down. "Okay, Jeremy. Now, talk. What's going on?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Sorry, Foamy, I can't. Dobson may want to tell you, but that's up to him. I can't say a word. But you can tell me this: what made Philip Ackeroyd—"

"Ha—that was easy. This morning I met our governor friend in the corridor and he made a pass at me."

"He what?" Fred Parker demanded, sitting down.

"He made a pass at me. You know, got fresh. I slapped his face and he went away. It was the third time."

Parker chortled, and then he banged his hand down on the table. "That's rich, really rich. That little fat guy, and a governor no less. Tell me, Foamy, does Doc here make passes too?"

"Umm-m, no. Jeremy's a perfect gentleman. Really."

Jeremy frowned. He was definitely not happy because she considered him a perfect gentleman.

"Anyway," Foamy said, "I just told Mr. Ackeroyd this: He could walk right by me and I wouldn't try to stop him, not even slap him like I did when he made that third pass at me. I'd just go to Mrs. Ackeroyd and whisper something in her ear."

Parker slapped the girl's back, not ungently. "Well, I guess that settles his hash, all right. But now, how about Doc here? He knows something and he doesn't want to tell, and I think even Mrs. Philip Ackeroyd, who isn't a genius, must know this breakdown of the ship is a bit on the phoney side. Okay, Jeremy m'boy, spill it."

Jeremy shook his head again. "You're acting foolish, because if I won't tell Foamy, I won't tell you. Why don't you act like an ordinary passenger?" Jeremy winked at Foamy and found the startled look she gave him decidedly pleasing. "Well," said Jeremy, stretching, "it's been a long day. I think I'll turn in."

"Sure you wouldn't be going forward, Jeremy?" Parker wanted to know.

Jeremy gave him an acid look. "You figure it out. Only the door leading rearships is open. To go forward I'd either have to walk through metal or get the key by reaching into Foamy's blouse pocket and—"

Foamy's blouse swelled prettily with Foamy's firm, youthful flesh. "Good night, Jeremy," she said. "Definitely, good night."

Jeremy got up and started to leave, but he heard the sound of a key being inserted into a lock. Everyone in the room was suddenly very still, and he heard the tumblers fall. The door which Foamy had locked swung in.

**J**ACK CRANSHAW entered the dining room, not as drunk as Jeremy

had seen him before, but still drunk enough to cause trouble. "Hi, Foamy!" he called out. "How's the girl?"

"I'm fine," Foamy told him. "Only I think it would be a lot better if the passengers didn't see you this way. Won't you get back inside like a nice guy?"

Poor Foamy, Jeremy thought. Lately, her job seemed to consist of keeping people in or out of the dining room.

"See that?" Philip Ackeroyd asked his wife. "We're in some kind of trouble. I was right. I demand to know what's going on, Mr. Cranshaw, if you can talk."

"Oh. Hi, Mr. Ackeroyd. No need to go off half-cocked, please sir. I ain't drunk. I woulda been, only some stinker spilled all my liquor.... I just sat there with Bart, watching the thing. It drifted real close, real close. Now we're hanging two, three miles apart, and I can see all those little portholes in its belly, like a couple of dozen angry eyes. Nope. I don't want to go back and watch it."

"Shut up!" Foamy said, and she ran around behind the unsteady Cranshaw, circled his neck with one lithe movement of her arm, cupped her hand tightly over his mouth.

"No!" Ackeroyd blustered. "Let him talk! They say stay put and we stay put. Well, I'm the new governor of Sosiphon Two, and I want to know what's going on. I insist."

"He insists," Foamy said, letting go of Cranshaw and barring the door with her body. The action had gone to Cranshaw's head now, and he fell down. He tried to get up, but he lay there, flopping about, mumbling under his breath.

"Yes, I insist," Ackeroyd repeated. "Now then, Miss McGann—will you make way for your governor?"

The stewardess stood her ground. "You don't govern this ship, Mr.



Ackeroyd. I take my orders from Astrogator Dobson, and he said no one was to go forward. So, no one goes."

Someone said, "I think Governor Ackeroyd is right. They're keeping us in the dark about something, and if it's dangerous, we have a right to know. I'm with you, Governor!"

"You're damned right!" a man from across the room agreed. "This is the twenty-sixth century, we're all enlightened. Just who does this Astrogator Dobson think he is, anyway?"

Foamy seemed small standing there, just a pretty girl in trouble. People began to converge on the door, but Jeremy reached it first, and Parker was right behind him.

"I thought—" Foamy began.

"Baby," Parker smiled, "if there's any trouble, we're with you."

**A**CKEROYD turned his attention to Jeremy. "Out of my way, Professor Jenks. I mean it. There'll be trouble if you try to stop me."

The first sound to come from Jeremy's mouth was a dry clucking, and he could feel his heart beating heavily against his ribs, but then he said: "Please keep back. I—I don't want to fight with you—"

After that, Jeremy didn't know quite how it started but Ackeroyd pushed him and he stumbled half way through the open door. He pushed back and Ackeroyd hit him. It wasn't a hard blow, but it caught him across the bridge of his nose and brought tears to his eyes. He hit back, awkwardly, and he heard a lot of air *woosh* out of the fat man's stomach, and then Ackeroyd was clutching him in a two-hundred-pound bear hug.

Dimly, he was aware of the fighting all about him—Fred Parker striking out with iron fists in all directions, Foamy darting in and out, hitting with her fists and clawing with

her nails, trying to divert some of the men from Parker.

Jeremy felt himself borne back by Ackeroyd's ponderous bulk, and soon he was grappling with the fat man in the corridor. He hit the floor with a jarring impact, Ackeroyd on top of him. He writhed, and they rolled over and over down the corridor. Overhead, he could see feet flashing by, heading forward, and one pair of feminine legs kicking furiously, borne aloft. Someone had lifted Foamy bodily and was carrying her toward the control room.

Her voice faded down the corridor. "Put me down, you oaf! Just put me down and I'll break your neck. I'll tear you apart, one little piece at a time. Put me down! If I were a man.... Ohh!"

Ackeroyd lay back, panting, and Jeremy stood up. "They're all...inside," he said. "I—think we ought—to—follow—damn you...." He couldn't quite catch his breath. His legs were trembling.

Nearby, Parker propped his head up on an elbow.

"There's a discoloration about your eye," Jeremy informed him, almost cheerfully. "You'll find it difficult to be romantic with Foamy."

Parker snorted. "You should see yourself. Both eyes, Doc. You'll never teach extranthropology this way. Jenks, the terror. Your students will quake every time you come near.... Hey! There goes Ackeroyd—"

Together, they got up and ran down the companionway, and when Jeremy entered the control room the twenty-sixth century took a quick nose-dive and plummeted down the long channels of culture, plunking down soundly in some prehistoric age where men wore skins, scratched lice out of each other's hair, and wooed their females with gnarled clubs.

**W**ITHIN the control room Jeremy stood and looked about him, and

his mind right then could only function in one way—it was just like a showcase lecture in extranthropology. He could see exactly what the lecture notes would look like.

One. Jack Cranshaw was dead. The assistant astrogator had probably staggered back to the control room to help Dobson, and someone had bashed in the side of his head with a blunt instrument.

Two. Three or four men and two women—including Foamy—sat around the room, dazed, with blood on their faces.

Three. Off in the foreport, the alien ship seemed the size of the full moon, with an ominous string of port-holes around its fat belly. Waiting. Maybe watching.

Four. Someone knelt near Jack Cranshaw, muttering. The muttering turned to babbling, and then he began to cry. The someone was Bart Dobson.

Five. Philip Ackeroyd stood at the radio, barking into it: "...of course I'm not drunk. I'm the governor, man. Yes, Ackeroyd. Yes, a ship, not an Earth ship. There's a mess here. Trouble. I tried to stop them, but when they saw it they ran wild, killed one of the astrogators, name of Cranway or Cranshaw, I think. What shall we do?"

Jeremy heard the answering voice: "Nothing. Don't do a thing. We'll contact the nearest patrol ship, but it won't reach you inside of a month. Just stay put. Don't move. Don't get hostile with the foreign ship. *Don't move until the patrol comes.*"

Ackeroyd spluttered, "That's ridiculous, man! Who am I talking with, anyway?"

"Captain Sprague, Earth Military on Sosiphon Two. And don't tell me it's ridiculous. I don't care if you're the president of the Galactic Federation. That's what you do, understand?

You stay put."

"Young man, you won't be a captain when I finish with you. I say this ship heads for Sosiphon Two and lands there. We're not going to be sitting ducks for your aliens, you can bet your life on that..."

Jeremy watched Dobson take one more look at the dead second astrogator, then stand up, shaking, and walk to the radio.

"Astrogator Dobson speaking," he said.

"Hello," the radio snapped back. "This is Dutch Sprague. You remember me, back on Sirius five years ago? Lieutenant in the navy then."

"I...remember. They murdered him, Sprague—for no reason at all."

"Who murdered whom?"

"Passengers. Ackeroyd instigated—"

"That's a lie!" boomed Ackeroyd. "The dead man attacked us first."

"They murdered him," Dobson said. "Killed—him—in cold—blood."

"Dobson? You all right?" Sprague's voice was anxious.

"Yes...no-o." Jeremy saw Dobson clutch his side in pain, stagger away from the radio. He dragged himself forward, spoke again: "They gave me—a pretty thorough—going over, Sprague. Internal injuries—I think. Feel lousy, but—awaiting your—orders."

"I gave them to Ackeroyd, Dobson. Did you hear? Dobson? *Dobson!*"

**D**OBSON didn't hear a thing. He crumpled to the floor suddenly, like a sack filled at top and bottom, with nothing to support its middle.

Foamy ran to him and ripped open his shirt. Jeremy, still standing on the brink of the room, not knowing quite what to do, almost afraid to plunge in lest he somehow become part of the carnage, looked. Dobson's abdomen seemed bloated, distorted, blue. From this distance Jeremy could de-

tect no heartbeat. But Dobson's lips were flecked with a deep red.

Foamy stood up, stiffly. "He's dead," she said. She put a hand on Philip Ackeroyd's shoulder, spun him about. "He's dead," she said again.

Her palm struck his face, hard. Then she pulled it back and struck again, with both hands, hard, stinging blows. Ackeroyd grabbed her wrists, held her.

"Little minx! I could—"

Jeremy ran into the room. He couldn't walk. If he walked he'd have time to see the people with their hurt, bleeding faces, to see Cranshaw, dead, his skull bashed in, to see the dead Bart Dobson with his bloated torso. He remembered something someone had told him once. The harder you ball your fist, the harder you can hit. And don't push. Snap your blow.

*Splat!* Jeremy felt his knuckles crunch against the weak chin. Ackeroyd sighed once, fell on his back, lay still. Jeremy turned to Foamy, but she was busy with the radio.

"...Leatrice McGann, stewardess aboard the starcoach. Yes, both astrogators are dead. When we reach Sosiphon, I'd like to have a civil court—"

"Certainly, Miss McGann," Sprague's voice answered her.

"For now, can I lock them up? Just half a dozen, Ackeroyd and some of the passengers. I can see why this Ackeroyd is a politician. He had them half crazy with a couple of words."

Silence. Then: "Um-m, no. Afraid not. Not on my authority. I can give myself just so much rope, Miss McGann. How do I know what really happened until there's an investigation? No, you can't lock them up. Now, who's left on your crew?"

"Just two of us," said Foamy. "There's old Hank Cobb in the hydroponics room. Past eighty. And there's me. That's all. I suppose you'll

want me to be in charge, Captain. Well, I suppose I can try. I suppose—"

"Please, Miss McGann. Stop supposing and let me talk." Captain Sprague's voice sounded very tired, "I don't know what's going on there. All I have is an unofficial report of two murders, an unofficial report of an alien ship. I'll radio the patrol. In a month—"

"A month! Captain Sprague, I've got a bunch of scared, angry people on my hands! These aliens could be deadly, and—"

"I can't help it, Miss McGann. The nearest patrol ship according to my charts is about a month away, further than Sosiphon itself. And you haven't got a bunch of any kind of people on your hands, Miss McGann. I'm sorry, but I can't authorize you to govern the ship. You figure it out—a twenty-one year old girl—you just wouldn't command respect.

"I've checked your passenger lists with Milky Way's office here on Sosiphon Two, and the only man on your ship qualified to take charge of things is Governor Ackeroyd. So Miss McGann, while I don't want to seem arbitrary, you are to take your orders from Ackeroyd. Finally, do not use your radio. Hostile aliens might be able to put a directional beam on it. Anyway, Ackeroyd will tell you what to do." After that, the radio was silent.

So was Foamy.

**A**CKEROYD stood up, rubbed his chin ruefully. "Captain Sprague says we stay right here. All right, we stay. But we have two things to do. First, there are the dead men. We'll jettison their bodies into space, and—"

"Nuts," said Foamy. "They might be picked up by the alien ship. That might help them find Earth or its colonies."

"How, Miss McGann?" Ackeroyd was contemptuous. "You're talking like a frightened little girl. You want me to keep them here instead?"

Jeremy strode forward. "I'd say Foamy's right. Only—"

"Only," Fred Parker finished for him, "friend Ackeroyd's running this show, eh Doc?"

Ackeroyd's voice mocked them: "Well, gentlemen, thank you for your faith in me. I say further that anyone who doesn't cooperate with the decisions we're about to reach should be forcibly detained. So, first we jet-tison the bodies. I won't have them here on the ship—"

"Naturally," Foamy told him. "They'll only remind you you're responsible."

He ignored her. "Second, any trouble starters must be confined. By force, if necessary. Tomkins, Wilson—you'll act as the military."

Foamy knew the passenger list by heart. "Those two?" she said. "A cheap gambler and a night club bouncer!"

"Your first job," Ackeroyd told the two grinning men, "is to see that Miss McGann is confined to her quarters, permanently. As of now."

Tomkins chortled. "A pleasure. Come on, Foamy—"

She backed away from him slowly. "Keep away. No one's going to be locked up. Stay back or—"

Tomkins came forward.

"Ooo, how I wish I were a man! I'd ram that stupid smile right down your throat. I'd—"

**N**OW, JEREMY knew, was the time to take sides. But if he tried to help the girl he'd probably wind up being confined, too. Since that wouldn't do any good, he'd have to wait....

Fred Parker took his stand. He edged close to Foamy and said,

"You'll have to take me, too, if you take her. I won't stand here and—"

Ackeroyd shrugged. "It's just as well, Mr. Parker, to know what side you're on, don't you think? Anyone else? How about you, Professor Jenks?"

Jeremy said, "Don't look at me. I've had enough fighting for one day, thanks."

"Sensible. Sensible. Then that's the way we line up," said the governor. "Everyone on one side—the side of the law. Miss McGann and Mr. Parker on the other. Take them, gentlemen."

Jeremy met Foamy's eyes for an instant, and he turned away. If ever he saw contempt, loathing....

The fight was brief. Wilson soon had Foamy draped across one shoulder, writhing and kicking furiously. Tompkins' right hand lashed out and chopped across Parker's jaw, and as the blond man stumbled he was spun around, his left arm grabbed and forced up and in toward his body. Parker gritted his teeth and relaxed, deciding wisely, Jeremy realized, against a broken arm.

Philip Ackeroyd beamed upon his two henchmen. "The library will be as good a place as any. Keep them together there, locked up." He groped about the instrument shelf, came up with what he wanted, threw a ring of keys to Tompkins.

The bouncer and the gambler walked their two prisoners out of the control room.

Often in the days that followed Jeremy watched the passengers gather in the observation dome to look at the alien craft. Before long it became a game: You wagered what you thought the aliens would look like, or you bet a considerable sum on whether the aliens would be seen or not, or you wagered you would reach Sosiphon Two in time to celebrate Christmas.

Two or three times Jeremy tried to learn about Foamy and Fred Parker, but he'd only get routine answers to his questions. Yes, they were still in the library, and yes, they were being fed twice daily, and yessiree, Doc, I wouldn't mind being in that Parker's place, locked up with a gorgeous dish like that....

Jeremy blushed furiously, felt frustrated, and stopped asking questions.

**N**IGHT IN Jeremy's cabin.

Someone prodded his shoulder, said: "Professor Jenks! Professor, get up."

He sat up and rubbed sleep from his eyes. "What time is it? Why'd you get me up in the middle of the night?"

"Three ayem, Professor Jenks. Governor Ackeroyd's orders—he wants you in control immediately."

Jeremy was annoyed. "Can I at least get out of my pajamas?"

"Nope. Governor says to hurry. Just hop into a robe and let's go."

Their shadows lengthened, then disappeared, then shot out ahead of them again under the green night lights in the corridor. Half a dozen people stood in the control room, close to the inner airlock door. There was Philip Ackeroyd, his wife, the tall gambler Wilson, others.

Ackeroyd said, "It's about time. I thought it would take you all night."

Jeremy ignored the remark. "What's the matter?" he said. "Why'd you call me?"

"Come over here and take a look, Jenks. Bet you never saw anything like this before."

Jeremy looked. He hadn't. "Where—what—?"

"Hah! Thought that'd get a rise out of you. Know where they're from, Jenks?"

"Of course I know. From the other ship. What I want to know is this: How'd you get them?"

"What do you think? We didn't kidnap them across a couple of miles of space, that's for sure. They just came. Must have been shot out of the other ship's lock with considerable force, got past its gravity, were attracted here. A few men went hull-side in space-suits and got these... things."

Things was right. Jeremy guessed each one to be about eight or nine feet long from the pointy top of the cranium down to the incredibly tiny feet. He wondered if bilateral symmetry might be a clue to intelligence. Men with their two arms and two legs located at opposite sides of the body, with their two lungs and two sets of bones, one the mirror image of the other, were symmetrical bilaterally. And now these things followed the same pattern. They didn't look like men, not really: they had one pair of forelimbs too many, and both the arms and legs had not one, but two working joints above the wrist. They had no fingers to speak of, merely a set of four opposed fleshy hooks lined up two and two.

**S**TILL, THE pattern existed. The creatures could have been symmetrical radially, or they might not have been symmetrical at all. But men and the green things of the other ship could be cut expertly down the middle with a huge pair of shears, and each half would be a mirror image for the other.

Ackeroyd shook Jeremy from his reverie. "Snap out of it, man! I figured you knew about things like this so I wanted to see you, but I didn't expect you to go into a blue funk about it." He frowned. "What I want to know is this: What kind of weapons do you think they have?"

Jeremy stood up from the green things. "How should I know?"

"Well, I can make some guesses myself, Jenks, but I want to see what an authority has to say."

"Not a thing, but thanks for the compliment. I can only think in terms of the sub-cultures, and I know, for example, that a radially symmetrical creature might have some form of sling-shot, say, instead of a bow and arrow. Necessity's the mother of invention, you know. You couldn't imagine how a radial creature could manipulate a bow that requires two arms which can oppose—"

"Yes, yes," Ackeroyd cut him short. "Very interesting. But I want to know about these green things."

"Well, I can't say much. They're extremely similar to man—"

"You're crazy, Jenks! Four arms, a couple of hooks on each one, ears like mushrooms. They look like us, you say?"

"Yes, in a very general way. I'd say that the physical pattern in each case is the same, also the mental and emotional development."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well, we each have interstellar travel—so that sets a cultural level below which the aliens couldn't fall. Emotional, well—we're lingering here, daring not to move, not knowing what to do. Aren't they doing the same thing? Aren't they afraid, too?" He paused, cleared his throat. "I'd say all this puts them on pretty much the same level as it puts us. So, if I can say anything at all about their weapons, it would be this: Probably they're like ours."

"Ridiculous!" Ackeroyd stormed. "Look at those things. One has its head stoved in, like with a blunt instrument; the other two obviously were stabbed. Here's the way I say it shapes up, Jenk: We threw two dead men out in space, remember? So, they found the bodies. Apparently they thought it was an overture of

some sort, and they were afraid. They felt the safest thing to do would be to reciprocate—so they sent us three of their kind, not to be outdone. Of course, they killed them by the most readily available methods, proving how primitive their military power is.

"So—I think we can blast them out of space and get the hell away from here. It'll be a cinch, too!"

**JEREMY SMILED.** "Go ahead and think so. I don't think I could talk you out of it even if I wanted to." He intended that statement to cut deep. He had to prove Ackeroyd wrong. If he didn't, the governor might well decide to blast away at the alien ship with their little pea-shooter. The results could be disastrous.

"Bah!" stormed the governor. "Stupid pedant! Let's see what the rest of them think. Ursula?"

The woman had a squeaky voice which reminded Jeremy oddly of chalk scraping on a blackboard. "If you say it's true, dear, then it must be."

"Wilson?" Ackeroyd demanded. "Tompkins?"

"I don't know," said the gambler, and the bouncer shook his head too.

"Dr. Henderson?"

The gray-haired man frowned. "You just asked me in here to see if these...creatures were dead. They're dead."

"Entwhistle?"

"A guess. It's a good guess. That's all I know."

Jeremy could tell that none of the answers pleased the governor of Sosiphon Two. Jeremy spread his hands out wide. "Now what?"

"Okay, wise guy. What's your theory?"

Jeremy spoke slowly. "I've tried to show how these green things seem to

parallel man in development. Right? Now, let's go a step further. Let's assume that big globe out there is a passenger ship, just like this starcoach. Just like we didn't, they didn't know what to do either. It worried them as much as it did us, way out here, half way across the Galaxy, on the fringe of the unknown. We had a fight, a panic, a riot. Two men were killed—"

"Their own faults!"

"I'm not arguing that now. Point is, two men were killed. How were they killed?"

"Beaten, that's how."

"Right. Just fists and blunt instruments, not even a knife. If the aliens found our two men, and if they followed your way of thinking, they'd say we were so primitive we didn't even know how to use knives...."

"Okay. What are you driving at? Damned if I can see the connection."

"Wait, I do," Dr. Henderson said. "You're saying, Professor Jenks, that very much the same thing happened on their ship as happened on ours. Panic, riot, and three men—uh, things—got killed. Someone decided to jettison the bodies—we found them!"

Jeremy nodded, earnestly. "Right all the way, doctor. So we just don't have any indication of what weapons we might expect the green things to have. But everything points to a culture similar to ours."

Ackeroyd was grumbling now, unable to argue with the sound logic, but Dr. Henderson smiled. "Brilliant, professor. I see it now—brilliant logic. I'll have to agree with you: I can't recommend that we fire on that ship."

Ackeroyd said, "That's all well and good, gentlemen. A lot of pretty theories. But I'm damned if I want

to stay out in space like this a month and wait for a patrol cruiser which may get here. When morning comes I'm going to find a passenger who knows how to use that gun, and then we'll blast your sphere full of green things to hell and back. Understand?"

THE LITTLE meeting in the control room broke up soon after the governor's decision, and Jeremy waited until everyone left. Then he padded silently down the corridor in his slippers. Past several closed doors his way led him, and soon he reached the dining room. Within, Tompkins and Wilson, the bouncer and the gambler, were busy with their belated nightcaps.

"Hi," Jeremy said. "Mind if I join you?"

They looked at him queerly, and Tompkins snorted, "Don't tell me you drink, Doc?"

"I—uh—imbibe."

"Ha—ha. You hear that, Wilson? He imbibes. Okay, Doc, come in and imbibe with us."

Jeremy reached into the pocket of his robe and withdrew a bar of vitamin B concentrate. Since the appearance of the round ship, he had always carried a quantity of these bars with him. He knew from past experience that he often forgot to eat in a tense situation, and the concentrate would guarantee him a good supply of energy. But now he smiled. He'd use his vitamin B for a different purpose entirely: It would prevent the alcohol's toxic effects. He felt almost chipper as he munched his bar.

The first three rounds were hundred-proof stuff, a synthesized copy of what the Fomalhaut sub-culture called *askara*. Jeremy didn't bat an eyelash as he drank.

"Can you beat that!" Tompkins

roared. "Old Doc's all right. What'll it be next, Doc? You just name it."

"Well," Jeremy said, "I've always meant to try Capellan brandy. The natives call it *smurth*, I think."

Wilson frowned. "That stuff's strictly one to a customer." But he got down the bottle.

It was the color of blood and the first *smurth* hit Jeremy a lot like liquid fire, making him gag. Two *smurths* later, Jeremy began to feel dizzy, in spite of the B concentrate. The room began to whirl, slowly and pleasantly, then faster. *Wheeeee!*

**T**OMPKINS AND Wilson were singing a raucous ballad about a female mutant on Deneb Three who could do several things at once because of certain anatomical duplications.

"S' good!" Someone pounded Jeremy's back with a hand like a slab of undifferentiated syntheplasm. "'Spretty good, Doc. Maw!'"

Maw must have meant more, and Jeremy obliged with the *smurth*. The room commenced to whirl more rapidly, and Jeremy walked to the wall. It must have taken him five minutes.

He returned presently with a lot of torn curtain. Tompkins and Wilson sprawled in their chairs, listlessly. Jeremy went to work with the curtains.

"Hey, Doc—wacha doing? Hey, cut it out—*sblurp!* You're tying me up. Down—?"

The job was done sloppily but effectively, and Tompkins and Wilson looked like parts of the interior decoration, all trussed up. Jeremy next rammed a thick gag into each flaccid mouth, then staggered back to survey his handiwork. With trembling hand he reached into the pocket of his robe, took out another bar of the concen-

trate. He munched.

In a moment he ran his hands clumsily through Tompkins' pockets. Soon he came up with a ring of keys, mumbled thank you, observed that both Tompkins and Wilson were snoring quite profoundly, staggered to the door, closed it, locked it, spit on his finger and held it up gingerly to ascertain which way the wind was blowing remembered shamefacedly that he was indoors, on a spaceship in deepest space in fact, squinted in the green light until he saw a sign which said "library" and which pointed unwaveringly arearships, followed the arrow, reached the door and felt panic for a moment when he searched through his robe for his missing library card, smiled when he realized it was after hours, tried several keys in the door and finally found the right one.

**F**RED PARKER stood up. "Jeremy! Jeremy Jenks! I will be damned. You look green. Oh, it's the lights.... What the hell have you been drinking?"

"*Smurth*," Jeremy grinned foolishly. "Where's Foamy?"

"Sleeping back of ancient history somewhere. *Smurth*—and you're still walking? Amazing."

They found Foamy back of ancient history, and Jeremy prodded her shoulder dramatically with a slippered foot. "Get up, Foamy, Get up, you are delivered...."

Foamy rubbed her eyes. "Hello, Jeremy. Don't tell me they threw you in here with us, too?" She looked a little angry, but then when Jeremy shook his head and tittered she said, "Umm, get that aroma. I'll be right back."

She disappeared through classics of the English language, came back from the washroom with a pot of water.



"Fred, get our coffee down, will you? I'd say Jeremy needs about a gallon."

Jeremy giggled, watched them boil the water over a can of stored heat. Then he was sitting on the floor and Foamy forced cup after cup of strong coffee into his mouth. It burned.

Later, he told them everything that had happened. "...so, in a couple of hours Ackeroyd plans to fire on that alien ship. It's a mistake—an awful mistake."

"You're telling me!" Fred Parker said. "But what I want to know is this: what do we do about it? I mean, right now?"

"Can we count on any allies?" Jeremy wanted to know.

"Hank Cobb," Foamy told him. "If you think he'll do any good. You know, Jeremy, the little old guy in charge of hydroponics. He has a set of keys and he's been bringing us food in here. Says that he hated Ackeroyd ever since he saw the man's face."

Jeremy smiled. "Sounds perfect. Okay, here's what we do. You get this Cobb and come with him, on the double, to the control room. Fred and I will be there. The first and most important job is to keep everyone else out, including Governor Ackeroyd. Can you and Cobb be there inside of ten minutes?"

Foamy ran for the door. "Make it five, slow poke. See you two in control."

"**SO** THESE are the green things," Parker mused.

Jeremy nodded. "Yes, and there's a much more crowded sector of the Galaxy, out there beyond the Ophiuchus nebula. It's not too far-fetched to assume that there are other cultures, just as advanced, perhaps more...."

"Yeah. You think we'll ever get out of here, Doc?"

Jeremy nodded. "I think we have a good chance, provided Ackeroyd doesn't cause trouble. We'll see."

A buzzer sounded, and Parker barked, "Who is it?"

"Me. Foamy. Open up."

Jeremy slid back the bolt and opened the door. The old man who followed Foamy into the room was small and bent, with an almost leathery skin and a merry twinkle in his eyes. "Howdy, folks!" he greeted. "Hank Cobb at your service. When do I get a crack at this Ackeroyd jackass?" He ran on nimble legs to the foreport. "By gosh, there's the ship. They told me about it, everyone did—but hearing about it and seeing it are two different things."

Jeremy looked over his shoulder. "That's it, all right." Just looking at the silent globe hanging off there in space he almost could feel the size of the Galaxy. Perhaps when man climbed down from his arboreal womb a million years ago these green things had a similar birth. Evolution must have followed a similar path all the way. Two worlds, about the same size, cooling together across fifty thousand light years of galactic space, with the amoebal slime given genesis along a stormy sea-shore on each planet at about the same time, with the slow rise of life from—

"Jeremy! Jeremy, snap out of it. Someone's at the door." It was Foamy talking, and Jeremy turned away from the port, shaking his head to clear it.

Now he heard the insistent clamor of the buzzer, the metallic voice over intercom: "Open up in there! This is Governor Ackeroyd. Open up."

"Go fly an asteroid derelict!" Hank Cobb cried, his voice just below a shriek.

"Come on now, open up. I know who you are. We found the library empty and we found Tompkins and

Wilson in the dining room. Open up, Jenks, and we'll be easy with you."

"I DON'T hear any angry crowd threatening us with righteous indignation, Governor," said Jeremy.

"Crowd? Crowd! I don't need it! I have Mr. Entwhistle with me. You remember Mr. Entwhistle, Jenks. He knows how to use this ship's blaster. That's what I'm here for. We're coming in to blast that alien vessel out of space before it does the same thing to us."

"This door is locked from the inside," Jeremy replied. "There's not a weapon on the ship. You can't force us out, so why don't you—"

"I can't, can't I? Our mutual friend Tompkins is in the 'ponics room. Yes, he has a nasty hangover, but he's there. We'll just feed the pipes backwards for the control room. You won't get a fresh supply of air, courtesy of all the nice growing green things back in 'ponics. Instead, we'll pipe you the carbon dioxide. That could be lethal, you know—in about half an hour it will take the place of all the air in there. So—come out or die, Jenks. Come out or die!"

"Pleasant guy," Parker said. "Say, Hank, can he really do that?"

"You bet he can, Mr. Parker. Be a cinch. Half an hour after the start, like he says."

Ackeroyd's voice: "So—what's your answer, Jenks?"

Jeremy tried to stall. "Why don't you let us think about it, Governor? Give us, say—"

"No. I can't wait all day. I'm going back to 'ponics now to help Tompkins get things started. You can think in the half hour left to you. Better start now..."

Jeremy heard the intercom pick up the click-clacking of footsteps fading down the corridor. He turned to his companions. "Well, that's it. Up to

us now." Suddenly he smiled. "Listen! Hank and Foamy, you stay here. Don't let anyone in—"

"Where do you think you're going?" Foamy demanded.

"Well, we have just one chance. No one's outside the door now, so we can leave and—"

"Yeah!" Parker cried. "I see it, Doc. If we can get Ackeroyd in here, fast, he'll change his mind about the CO<sub>2</sub>. And how he'd change it! Only how are we going to get him?"

Jeremy shrugged. "I don't know now. But maybe we'll know when we get outside. Maybe." He turned to Foamy. "Okay then—but promise me this: You two stay here and don't let anyone in. But when it starts getting hard to breathe, then you both get out. Promise?"

"Well..." Foamy hesitated.

"We won't go unless you promise. If you stay you'll only wind up killing yourselves, and that'll help no one."

"I—I promise, Jeremy."

"All right. And one more thing: I don't know what's going to happen out there. I—I hope it turns out the way we want. If not—Foamy—Foamy..."

She was in his arms, laughing and crying, so quickly that he didn't get a chance to be shy. He kissed her neck, her cheeks, her lips.

Parker was grinning. "I wondered how long it would take you to wake up, Doc? All she was talking about in the library was you. Jeremy this and Jeremy that—"

"Shh!" Hank Cobb raised a gnarled finger to his lips. "Shut up, Mr. Parker."

"Half an hour," Jeremy said, pulling away from the girl. "We'll be back. I love you, Foamy."

He stepped to the door, unbolted it, swung it open. Still grinning, Parker followed him down the corridor.

THEY MET gray-haired Dr. Henderson coming from the dining room. "I thought you two were locked up in control. Word got around—"

"We were," Parker told him.

"Well, it's none of my affair. I heard the argument last night. I'm not taking sides, but there's a lot to what you said, Professor Jenks. We all acted like a bunch of idiots, and I won't make the same mistake twice. I think you'll find most of us feel that way. And the murders—it makes me shudder. No one was responsible, really. Ackeroyd—"

Jeremy nodded curtly, and they were running down the companionway again. That speech, he knew, mirrored pretty accurately the feelings of most of the passengers.

They followed the bright green arrows which led toward the 'ponics room. Parker plucked a fire extinguisher off the wall along the way, hefted it experimentally. "This'll do, Jeremy," he said. "I wouldn't look at that Tompkins ape without an equalizer."

A few moments later they burst into the 'ponics room. Jeremy was only half aware of the long rows of tanks, the dank odor of vegetation, the throbbing of the pumps, the wet slime on the outside of a score of pipes. Ahead he saw the three figures crouched over some machinery. "Hold it!" he called.

Ackeroyd whirled to face them. "You, Entwhistle," he said, smiling grimly, "keep feeding that carbon dioxide, there's a good fellow. Tompkins?"

"Yeah?"

"Can you handle them, fast?"

The big man rubbed his hands together. "You bet," he growled, lumbering forward.

Jeremy sidestepped his lunge nimbly and stuck out his slippered foot. The contact sent bursts of pain shooting

up his leg, but Tompkins landed flat on his face. Parker lifted the extinguisher up high over his head just as the giant began to get up, then brought it down. Jeremy heard a crunching sound, saw Tompkins half sit up, stare stupidly for a moment, roll over on his back.

Jeremy ran for the row of valves. "All right, Entwhistle. You know how to put that thing into reverse and get some air into the control room?"

Ackeroyd made a run for it then. Jeremy took three steps in pursuit, left the ground. It was not a good tackle, because by all rules of the game he struck too high, near Ackeroyd's midsection. But the governor didn't know how to shake him off, and they fell in a heap.

For a moment Jeremy thought of their previous fight. It almost seemed ludicrous to him now. He struck out with both fists, and although Ackeroyd was striking back, he hardly felt the blows. Left and right, left and right—he drove his fists into the rat face until someone tugged at his weary arms.

"Get off him, Jeremy! Come on, Doc—he's unconscious."

Jeremy stood up. He watched Parker drag the fat figure to the door. He whirled, grabbed a fistful of Entwhistle's blouse.

"Reverse those valves!"

"You—you're hurting me. Yes, sir, I'll reverse them. But after that I'm getting out of here. I'm just an ordinary businessman. I sell vacuum cleaners. First he has me go out in a spacesuit and get those green things, then he wants me to fire a gun, then he has me monkey with these valves. I tell you now, I'm all through."

"Good," said Jeremy. He watched the man turn two sets of wheels, heard a hissing sound, then ran after Fred Parker to help him drag the governor through the corridor.

"IT WAS rough for a time," Foamy said. "But then the air began to clear suddenly."

Ackeroyd sat up, rubbing his chin. "Damn you, Jenks," he said. "When we reach Sosiphon Two—"

Parker snorted. "Public opinion on this ship has changed, *governor*."

"Yes," Foamy told him, "I think everything will be fine on Sosiphon Two. When what happened here comes out—"

Parker was smiling. "Just like a woman, Foamy. Doc, that gal friend of yours is forgetting one thing. Look—see through the foreport? There's the alien ship. Nothing of what we've done here has changed it one way or the other. It's still there. So—"

"Oh that," Jeremy grinned.

"Oh that, the man says," Foamy laughed. "There's the source of all our trouble, Jeremy—and you say oh that."

"Well, I've maintained that men and the green things have followed parallel paths of evolution. They're enough like us culturally to be our twin brothers."

"Those ghastly green things," said Foamy, looking at the trio which still lay on the control room floor. "Our twins?"

"Yes. Bilateral symmetry, and anyway, they came through the Ophiuchus nebula and saw us just about the same time we saw them. Right?"

"Right," said Foamy.

"We stopped. They stopped. Everyone was scared. Everyone waited for the other guy to make the first move. We're still waiting. So are they. You see my point?"

"I suppose so," said Foamy doubtfully.

Ackeroyd got up off the floor and made a run for the door. This time Fred Parker came up with a first-rate imitation of Jeremy's tackle. He

brought the fat man down and sat on his chest. "You were saying, Jeremy?"

"I was saying that if each ship could back out of this affair gracefully, everyone would be happy. Now, look at the nebula in Ophiuchus. It's the perfect curtain. If we back away from it and they ease into it, no one will see anything, and we can each go our separate way. We'll inform our government, they'll inform theirs—official ships loaded with politicians and scientists will return here. Anyway, that's not our problem."

"Point is, I think we can break up this stalemate. All we have to do is back up in little spurts and see if they follow suit, backing up until the nebula is between us. Then we can go our way. Foamy?"

"What, honey?"

"Start this ship moving backwards. Say, a little three-mile jump and wait, then see what they do. Then another three-mile jump."

"Me?"

"Of course you."

"But I can't pilot—"

"I thought because you were a stewardess you knew how—"

"No."

"Anyone else? Fred, you?"

"Nope, Doc. Don't look at me. I couldn't tell a firing stud from the stasis lever."

JEREMY sat back, dazed. That put a quick end to his plan. Probably no one aboard could pilot the star-coach. He had taken it for granted. . . .

"You looking for a pilot, Mr. Jenks?" Hank Cobb demanded. "I been a 'ponics man for forty years, but I was a pilot, first class, before that."

"Bless you," said Foamy.

Jeremy told him what must be done, and old Cobb's grin split his face almost all the way across.

"Should be fun," he said. "You want me to go back in little spurts, sorta like an upside-down frog."

"Sorta," Jeremy agreed.

They stood at the foreport eagerly, hardly hearing as Ackeroyd pounded from within the closet where Parker had locked him for safe keeping.

Old Hank Cobb played with the controls for a few moments, and then suddenly, soundlessly, the round ship in the port seemed to jump away from them. "Nearest I can figure it," said Cobb, "we've gone back three miles. Real fun. Now you want more?"

Jeremy told him not yet. They watched the port, grimly, silently. After that first jump there was nothing. Now a tiny mib against the Ophiuchus blackness, the alien ship stayed put.

"Jeremy," Foamy said, "maybe you were wrong...."

Then the ship jumped back! Perhaps four or five miles, on its own accord, the mib receded until it was a dot.

"Again," Jeremy told Hank Cobb.

"You mean now?"

"I mean now. Yes, now. Now!"

The alien ship was a tiny speck, a

fourth magnitude star against the nebula. It faded.

It disappeared.

Only the nebula....

"A curtain," Jeremy said, "shielding us from each other for the time being, at least. We'll get to them, and they'll get to us, and I have a hunch the meeting will be a friendly one when it comes."

"Well," Parker said, "let's radio Sosiphon Two and tell them what's been happening. Then Hank can drive us in."

"You radio them," Jeremy said. "I want to study those green things more thoroughly."

Foamy grabbed his arm and spun him around. "No you don't, Professor Jenks. You don't want to do that at all. You want to get to know the woman who's going to be your wife as soon as we land on Sosiphon Two, that's what you want to do."

He took her in his arms and hardly heard Fred Parker shouting into the radio.

Foamy purred. "Umm-mm... Jeremy. Umm-mm, see?"

Jeremy saw.

THE END

## WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE . . .

By  
JUNE  
LURIE

**A**STRONOMICAL observation is limited by many things; in particular, the atmosphere and the inherent limitations of optical instruments prevent astronomers from doing as much as they'd like. About the atmosphere—nothing can be done until an observatory is built in space or constructed on the Moon. That will come eventually, but until it does we'll have to be satisfied with the fluctuating layer of air above our telescopes.

The inherent limitations of optical lenses and their trains—the inability to increase what is called resolving power—cannot be changed to any great extent. Resolving power refers to the ability of a telescope or other system of lenses to separate too closely spaced images. Theory shows ex-

actly what causes this limitation and how well it is possible to conquer it. At present, then, we have just about reached the theoretical limits.

Now what do these flaws or faults mean? They mean to astronomers that they will never be able to observe the image of an actual star, save our own Sun, with optical equipment. This doesn't preclude the fact that some day someone might invent some electronic scanner that would create such an image, but that's in the future—and highly improbable. While we'll never be able to see any star's circular image, other than our own, in a telescope, that doesn't mean we can't learn a good deal about the stars—as has amply been demonstrated. Diameters, bril-

liancy and other factors can be determined in a variety of ways.

Using fast photo-electric cells and certain diffraction apparatus astronomers have been measuring the diameters of a number of moderately distant stars. In particular, Antares has been examined, but a discrepancy has been noted. Measurements disclosing that Antares' shape is not circular but elliptical in section indicated that it must be rotating at a rather high speed! In addition, the star's

diameter is continually fluctuating in a pulsating manner, indicative of part of an atomic reaction.

Thus it is rather miraculous to think that all these details can be learned about an object which, in the strictest sense of the word, can't really be seen! We see the light from Antares and we observe peculiar variations in it, but we never catch a glimpse of the image. In spite of this, however, we know all about the star's behavior!

## THE ANSWER NOBODY KNOWS

By

WALT CRAIN

SINCE men first began to learn about the chemical and electrical and mechanical processes of the human body—and lately about the brain—they've tried to call it a chemical, electrical or mechanical mechanism. The rise of science in the last hundred and fifty years has accentuated this trend. But as nice as it is to categorize, it doesn't apply—quite!

To a chemist, the body is a thermodynamic engine, taking in fuel, utilizing the heat to provide mechanical energy, and rejecting waste products. He can follow the chemical changes and compute the caloric intake—even the relative efficiency of the body. But a study of vitamins and hormones and other essential but little understood bodies, throws a monkey wrench into his nice little theories.

The electronics engineer sees the body as a communication system, a network of nerve-wires and electrical cells whose voltages and currents can be measured with assurance. The recent computing machines have given him a perfect analogy for the

brain function. But even he now sees that there is something more, something which he can't pin down with his oscilloscopes and vacuum tube voltmeters.

The mechanical engineer, of course, sees levers and joints which he uses all the time. To him the body is a perfect example of a mechanical multiplying device.

The theologist conceals his knowledge, rather than reveals it, behind a barrage of powerful impressive verbiage, but he doesn't really say a great deal. It must be admitted that he recognizes some additional principle, however, that defies analysis; call it "soul" or "spirit" or what have you. At present it is still beyond the realm of measuring instruments. And yet it is very real.

Perhaps it is destined that none of our scientists will ever reveal the ultimate secret—that of "what life is". And he won't determine it, it is certain, in performing human analyses—rather must he go to the basic constituent of all living things, the cell!

## the WEAPON THAT FAILED

by

JON BARRY

A GROUP OF socially conscious atomic scientists realized that when they invented the atomic bomb they were creating a chain of weapons which ultimately could lead to the destruction of all Mankind. Knowing the power of what they had wrought they decided that steps would have to be taken to educate the world into this knowledge and they concluded that the best way of accomplishing this would be by a campaign of planned fear. They acted from perfectly honorable motives. They painted the use of the atomic bomb as hideous beyond belief. They were sure that if people feared it enough they would never dare to use it in warfare.

Unfortunately their campaign backfired. They reckoned without the immorality of their enemies. They failed to realize that dictator states mold their peoples' judgments. The result is, as a number of scientists have publicly admitted, that the fear-campaign was and is a complete

failure. Instead, if it has succeeded in doing anything, it has increased the hatred potential of everyone! The general public has not been fully educated—only half-so. It recognizes only that the bomb is terrible, but we've got to use it someday, so that's the way it is.

In their fear-campaign, the scientists did not really exaggerate the horrors of atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb warfare. They painted a true picture of devastated cities and vast numbers of deaths. But these things are not sufficient to deter potential users. In an effort to remedy their errors, they are stopping the "horror-tales" and stressing the realities which can be faced. In this way they feel that despite the length of the present emergency, some way will be found to reconcile conflicting national interests and that the Earth will never be forced to go through the incredible, fantastic blood-bath that atomic war entails.

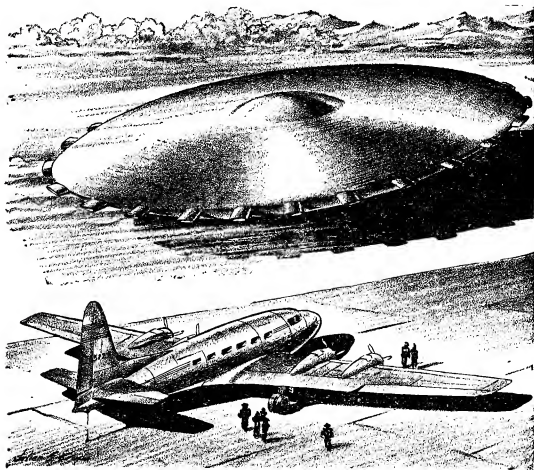
# MARTIAN THROUGH GEORGIA

*By Walt Sheldon*

**The invader decided Earth's planes were toys and its people fools. But then they learned there's no fuel like a new fuel!**

**W**AF SERGEANT Dawn Dougherty was the first to talk to them. She was on tower duty that morning. She didn't

pay much attention at first because she was thinking of this new, handsome Colonel John Feathers, the base commander. In her wishful thoughts



Air Base personnel poured onto the field as the strange craft slid smoothly along the runway

the gulf between a WAF sergeant and a West Point colonel was becoming narrower by the minute. It was largely a matter, she felt, of getting out of uniform and into something just fluttery and feminine enough to make him realize there was more to life than flyboys and whirling props. True, a B29 had lovely lines, but there was nothing wrong with her own—

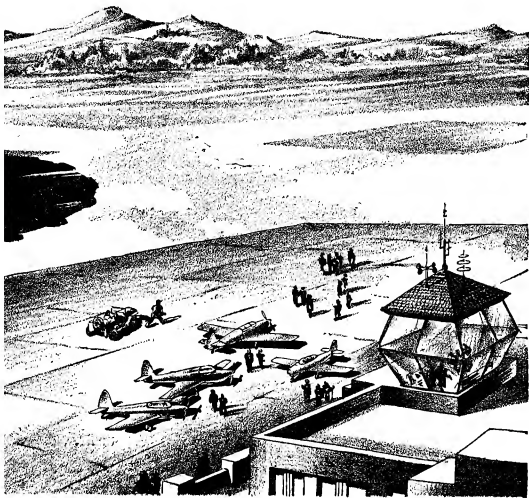
"Hello, Mayland Tower," said this plain, rather pleasant voice out of the blue. A well-modulated, but characterless voice—like a radio announcer's. "This is—uh—Air Force One-

Two-Three. Destination: Miami. Forty miles west of you. Need to refuel. Hate to inconvenience you, and all that, but you're the nearest field and our tanks are just about dry. Request detailed landing instructions. Over."

"Roger, One-Two-Three," said Dawn. She brushed back a squirt of chestnut hair. "Enter pattern at four thousand, use runway two-seven. No traffic. You are clear to land. Is that detailed enough?"

"How long's your runway? We'll need quite a stretch."

"Nine thousand six hundred feet."





She spoke routinely.

"Okay," said the voice. "That's a little short, but we'll try to make it."

Dawn said, "Roger," and started to turn to Corporal Brunhilde Muller, who was putting a new bulb in the light gun. She stopped; her eyebrows rose. "Hildy—did you hear that? The longest runway in the South, *and he says it's a little short!*"

"Probably one of those new types."

Brunhilde shrugged her plump shoulders and took a bite of the half-finished candy bar on the console.

Dawn nodded. "These new types. Getting to be a problem. I can never remember which has the double tail—the one-oh-four, or the one-oh-five."

"Simple," said Brunhilde. "You'd expect the one-oh-four to have it because that's an even number, only it doesn't. It's the other way around. That's how you remember it."

Dawn looked at her colleague sharply, but there was no guile in Corporal Muller's round, pink face. She was blithely licking chocolate from her fingers.

The loudspeaker barked again suddenly. "Hello, tower. One-Two-Three, again. I'm on downwind leg. Traffic still clear?"

Dawn started to pick up the mike to say it was, and then she did a second double-take. She stared at Brunhilde. "*On downwind leg?* Why...he was forty miles out a couple of seconds ago!"

But Brunhilde wasn't listening. She was looking at the sky. She lifted a plump finger and said in a queer, hushed voice: "Look."

\* \* \*

**C**OLONEL JOHN FEATHERS was having breakfast at his desk. Even though he was alone in his big knotty-pine and saddle-leather office he practiced his granite face. A young colonel like John Feathers had to have a granite face, just to keep

people from taking advantage of his thirty-one years. He made the face at his bowl of cornflakes.

There was a large picture-window in front of the colonel's desk, and it looked out from his second-floor headquarters over the airbase itself. He liked to come to his office early like this and watch the sun spread over the long runways and make them glisten. He liked to see the parked, V-winged jets dormant in front of the big hangars like so many unfledged wasps. He was, in fact, proud of his whole command—his first airbase command. He was determined to show the boys in the Pentagon that in spite of his youth he could do more than just lead a group of fighters through a meadow of flak....

Something overhead went: WHOOSH!

Colonel John Feathers turned his granite face upward. Who the devil had one of the jets up this early? And buzzing, too. He'd spoken about low flying. Sternly. One of these days he'd have himself a nice junior officer for breakfast on account of it.

Only—and this was odd—the thing that had whooshed didn't sound exactly like a jet. Fuller, throatier. He got up and went to the window.

John Feathers looked and the granite crumbled.

"Holy smoke," he said to himself. "What kind of an airplane is *that?*"

\* \* \*

**M**ASTER SERGEANT Joe Dracula was sleeping one off. He was in front of the main engineering hangar in a canvas chair and he had his long-billed cap far down over his eyes. The poker game last night had somehow turned into a swilling session. Georgia white mule. And then after a while everything had gone black—or, more accurately, soft gray

and fuzzy around the edges.

He was enjoying the warmth of the morning sun now. Nobody on the line to bother him. He was a tall, saturnine man with dark hair making a widow's peak on his narrow forehead, and a long, melancholy nose coming down from the widow's peak like the needle point on a radar jet. His name on the squadron roster was Joseph (No Middle Initial) Dacula, but everybody called him Joe Dracula, even Major Bing, the Operations Officer.

Joe<sup>\*</sup> Dracula hadn't always sought peace in alcohol. He'd been hitting the jug lately for the simple reason that there was little else to do here in the Georgia foothills. Joe had put in for a transfer a dozen times—just some little old field within driving distance of New York City would suit him fine—but nothing doing. Joe Dracula was, roughly, a genius among airplane mechanics. They wouldn't let a man like that get away—

Joe started to shift in his canvas chair to get a little more sun, and then something overhead went: WHOOSH!

He sprang up, startled. He knocked his hat off, caught it, and slapped it back on again. He squinted at the sky. He saw something round—or was it oval?—streak toward the other end of the field. Incredible speed—almost too much for his eyes to follow.

And then, as he stared, the curious aircraft all but stopped in mid-air, turned on what appeared to be the base leg of its landing pattern at a speed of about one hundred fifty miles an hour. No flaps—at least Joe couldn't see any. And he could make it out more clearly now. Like a big disk, bulging slightly in the middle. Trailing smoke or vapor of some kind.

Joe Dracula shook his head and thought: *What won't they think of*

*next. Probably that type will be all hell to service—*

He shrugged, dropped into the canvas chair again and considered looking up another slug of white mule. Just to steady him.

\* \* \*

THE QUEER disk came sizzling in on final approach. Its landing speed was about one-fifty. By the time it greased itself neatly on to the first eighth of the runway, pilots, mechanics, ground officers and even civilian clerks and typists were running to the line.

Someone said, "Where's the wheels?"

There weren't any. It landed directly on its smooth, convex belly, and didn't seem to be bothered by friction. Very little noise. It blurred down the runway to a stop.

Major Wallace Bing, the Operations Officer, ran a thumb along his bushy, RAF-style mustache, and muttered to himself, "Damme. Something not quite cricket." Major Bing never got tired of reminding himself—and anyone else who happened to be around—that he had spent time in England during the war. Six whole weeks, as a matter of fact, in an technical office in London.

Major Bing ran outside and hailed the checkered *FOLLOW ME* jeep that was on its way to the halted airplane. "Take me along like a good fellow, will you, Corporal?" he said to the driver.

"Jump in," said the corporal, unimpressed by both accent and rank.

The jeep careened down the taxi strip and as it came nearer, Major Bing began to note its size. His eyes grew wider. It was almost twice as big as a B-36, and being circular it was that big in all directions. Odd—no cockpit, or cabin. Not even a window, as far as he could make out. Flattened pipes set into the edge of the

disk, all around it. An odd burning smell—not kerosene, or gasoline, but it did seem familiar.

They came to the edge of the huge disk and Major Bing hopped out. Nobody around. He started to circle the thing. He cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled, "Hullo, there! I say, hullo!"

He went to the other side of the disk, out of sight of the jeep.

A voice behind him said, "Major?"

It was a first lieutenant. Young and rather handsome fellow—non-descriptly handsome, like a face in a collar ad. Smiling, pleasant, neat and clean, wearing a brand-new air blue uniform. Yet there was something about him. Something that struck Major Bing as being stiff, waxen. What was it? For the life of him, the major couldn't put his finger on it. He said, "Oh, hello, Lef—er—Lieutenant. Didn't see you. You're the pilot, what?"

"Yes," the lieutenant said. "Smith's the name. William Smith. Headed for Miami. I thought we'd better fuel up before we go on."

"Yes. Quite," said the major. He brushed his mustache with his thumb. "I'm Bing. Operations. I say, you'd better park on the line. The jeep'll find you a hardstand."

The lieutenant, still smiling that unreal, pearly smile said, "Sir, if it's all the same to you we'd just as soon stay here on the end of the runway. We'll pull over of course, so we don't block it. But we'd rather be as far as possible from curious eyes." He inclined his head toward the disk. "She's highly classified, as you might well imagine."

"Oh. Yes. Quite," said Major Bing. "Well, I'll see what I can do about a fuel truck."

"We won't need a fuel truck, sir," said Lieutenant Smith.

"You won't?"

"About fifty quarts of fuel will do us nicely."

"Only fifty *quarts*?" Major Bing lifted a careful eyebrow. "I say, that *is* odd. Kerosene or—er—petrol?"

"Neither, sir," said the lieutenant, "we were hoping we'd be able to find some pure grain alcohol."

The major's eyebrows continued to go up, then dropped suddenly. A sly smile came. "You're pulling my leg."

"Not at all, sir," said Lieutenant Smith. "Surely you've heard of the Dixon-Mason experiments in superinduced combustion of neoethyl?" His tone was polite, but with an amused edge.

"Eh? Oh, yes. Quite. Didn't know they'd reached the experimental stage. Well—well, then—fifty quarts. I'll have to check. Better come up to the office."

"Sorry, sir. Strict orders not to leave the...the airplane. You understand, of course."

"Oh. Well—wait here, then."

The lieutenant saluted. It isn't customary to salute on the field, but the major didn't notice that. And if the lieutenant's arm moved a bit stiffly the major didn't notice that either.

\* \* \*

WAF SERGEANT Dawn Dougherty, in the tower, was using binoculars, and using them intently. She said, "Gee."

"Let me look," said Corporal Brunhilde Muller. "Don't be a hog. What's it like?"

"Hm? What's what like?"

"The...whatever it is."

"Oh, that," said Dawn. She sighed. "I was looking at the pilot."

Brunhilde didn't exactly grab the binoculars, but she got them. Then she said, "Geel!"

Dawn kept staring, even without the binoculars. "I wonder if he's going to be based here."

"Forgot about Colonel Feathers already?" teased Brunhilde.

The sergeant made an unsergeant-like noise.

\* \* \*

Colonel John Feathers heard a knock on his office door and carefully made his granite face again. "Come in," he said.

Major Wallace Bing entered. He looked earnest. "I'm afraid, sir, we're caught short. I've checked the commissary and the hospital stores and we've only a couple of gallons of grain alcohol on hand. We should stock more of it."

"Grain alcohol?" said the colonel.

"He wants fifty quarts of it. You know—the Dixon-Mason experiments. Something about the . . . er . . . superinduced combustion of neoethyl. Very advanced model. Highly classified."

Colonel Feathers cleared his throat. "You mean that job that just came in?"

"Yes, sir. I mean to say, Colonel, he seemed to expect us to have it. They should have given us notice to stock the stuff."

"Yes," said the colonel. He was thinking maybe there *had* been such a notice. So many papers came in every day. If he—or the adjutant—had missed this one, well, he could imagine what they'd say up there among the ramps and bays of the Pentagon. *Good pilot, and everything, Feathers, and a nice fellow all that, you understand, but when it comes to administrative work . . .* The vision of a brigadier's star was fading.

The colonel said, "How quickly can you get a man into town and back again?"

"Perhaps twenty minutes—"

"Then get fifty quarts. Anywhere. Any price. Just so you get it quickly. And you'd better send the pilot to my office. I'll—uh—stall him."

"He can't leave the ship. Very

hush-hush."

"Well, all right. But get that alcohol. I'll go down to the runway and talk to this pilot."

Major Bing left. He broke into a trot as soon as he was out of the door. This *must* be important. Until now, he'd never seen the slightest flicker of agitation on the colonel's face.

In the office, Colonel Feathers knew about that flicker, too. He sternly composed himself. He pulled down the skirts of his blouse and straightened his tie before turning to the door.

The phone rang.

"Washington, sir," said the base operator.

He groaned inwardly. A long distance call from Washington would take at least fifteen minutes, maybe longer. The visiting pilot would guess why there was a delay. He'd mention it—casually, perhaps—and the word would get around. *Hear about Johnny Feathers not getting that new Dixon-Mason fuel in? Kept one of those new types waiting while his operations officer chased around town to get some of the stuff—*

He had an idea. "Operator," he said, "what's your grade?"

"What? Me, sir? I'm a corporal."

"You're a sergeant," he said, "as of now. Stall Washington. Tell 'em I'm around the base somewhere but you can't find me. Only don't try to find me. That clear?"

"Yes, sir," she said in tones that meant it wasn't.

He banged down the receiver. He adjusted his expression carefully once more before leaving the office.

\* \* \*

MASTER SERGEANT Joe Dracula rose, at first slowly, then suddenly and in an attitude of attention as he saw Major Bing. "Yes, sir?"

"Listen, Joe," said the major, "you drive faster than anyone around here. Take my car—too much delay at the motor pool. Get into town and get fifty quarts of grain alcohol. Fast."

"Huh?" said Joe. Trying to get his mind into mesh, and wondering what had happened to the major's British accent. Then another phrase came back to him. "*Fifty quarts?*"

"Demmed fast," said the major, recovering some of his accent. "If you get back in twenty minutes, I'll get you two weeks furlough. Hurry, old boy. Scram."

Joe's expression became crafty. "I don't care so much about the furlough, sir. What I'd like is a *transfer*. Mitchell Field, Long Island."

Bing frowned. "Well, I don't know—"

"You *do* want me to hurry, sir?" said Joe wickedly.

"All right, then," Bing snapped. "Mitchell Field. Get going."

Master Sergeant Joe Dracula forgot the heat and his throbbing head. He shot off in the major's car, and with a little wing surface it might have flown. Twenty minutes, and then that transfer. Only twenty minutes would be tough going if you counted the time it would take to buy the alcohol and everything.

He was halfway to town before he began to wonder what he was going to buy the alcohol with.

He groaned, lifted his foot to apply the brakes, and then slapped it down again. Twenty minutes would be almost gone by the time he returned to the base and found Major Bing and got money.

Then he remembered something. The little still on the side road where they'd obtained that white mule. His credit might be good there. And if Georgia white mule wasn't grain alcohol, what was?

LIEUTENANT Smith said, "Thank you, sir. Excellent servicing here." He saluted, a bit stiffly, and Major Bing and Colonel Feathers returned the salute a little self-consciously.

Smith smiled and walked back to the disk-like ship. An aperture appeared and he climbed through it. Inside he crawled through a curving passageway and finally emerged into a kind of control room.

A small, monkey-like creature looked up at him from a complex control board. In his own language he said, "Everything all right?"

Lieutenant Smith nodded his head. Then he took it off.

He zipped his way out of the rest of his awkward body. By now the craft was speeding down the runway in take-off.

"Any trouble, Zerid?" asked the thing at the controls.

"None at all," said the being that had been Lieutenant Smith. "In fact, we should have tried it sooner. It would have given us additional data on the state of their technological advancement."

He looked down through the bottom of the craft, which, from the inside was completely transparent. The ground seemed to be falling away much faster than usual. He glanced over Glephcon's hairy shoulder at the indicators and noted their rate of ascent.

"Something's wrong!" said the ex-Lieutenant Smith. "They—they must have guessed! They must have tampered with the fuel!"

"More than that," said Glephcon grimly, still holding the ship as a rodeo rider holds a bronco. "It's the fuel itself! I have the blast cut down to minimum. *Minimum*, do you hear? Do you realize what this means, Zerid?"

The other stared unbelievably. He was silent for a long moment. "*Their*

fuel," he said, "is far, far above ours. That's it, isn't it? They've kept this secret from us, somehow—"

Glephcon was still wrenching the controls, his face brown with desperation. "We'll have to report that. We'll have to get back to the home planet and report—if we can make it!"

Zerid said slowly, "This must have been a warning from them. I didn't think their minds ran to subtlety the way ours do—but there's no other answer. It's a way of showing us their true technological advancement—their true strength—"

"It'll change the plans," said Glephcon. "We'll have to wait now. Maybe give up the project and find another planet for colonization."

Heroically, he kept fighting the controls.

**D**AWN DOUGHERTY brushed back her squirt of chestnut hair and sighed as the disk moved away so fast that it practically disappeared before her eyes. "Gee," she said, "wouldn't it have been swell if they'd base him here? I'm getting tired of the gorillas you have to date around this outfit. He looked really *human* for a change."

Brunhilde stripped the wrapping from another candy bar and then attacked the sweet nervously. "Yeah," she answered. "By the way, what *was* the designation of that ship?"

"I didn't notice," said Dawn absently.

**M**ASTER SERGEANT Joe Dracula watched the strange craft disappear into the yondermost portion of the wild blue. It bucked, wobbled and darted from side to side before it was out of sight. Joe snorted and said, "Amateur pilot. Junior birdman."

He resumed his position in the canvas chair before the hangar. He pulled his cap-bill down over his eyes again.

He muttered to himself. "I know what happened. The pilot took a swig of that white mule. He'll be lucky if he ever gets where he's going."

**C**OLONEL FEATHERS returned to his office with Major Bing a step or so behind. He saw the uncradled phone and remembered the Washington call. He picked up the instrument. "Feathers," he said.

Then he listened. "Yes, general," he said at one point. He frowned—at first anxiously, and then gradually with broad disgust. He finally said, "Yes, sir. Will do."

He hung up. He turned to Major Bing. He had dropped his granite expression and he looked faintly weary. "The Pentagon. Now they're getting fantastic."

"Sir?" said the major politely.

"They've had reports of a flying saucer over North Carolina, headed south. They want us to watch for it. I suppose we'd better make a gesture of some sort, even if it is ridiculous. You know the Pentagon."

"Yes, sir," said Major Bing sympathetically. "I'll notify the tower."

## EXCALIBUR AND THE ATOM

By THEODORE STURGEON

The most incredible novel ever written!

By one of the greatest science-fiction writers

IN THE AUGUST ISSUE OF FANTASTIC ADVENTURES ON SALE JUNE 19



# The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

BY ROG PHILLIPS

LAST MONTH I wrote a long discourse on how I don't believe in criticising the efforts of fan publishers. It was barely at the typesetter's when a three page letter that attained the peak of vilification etc. turned up in my mail from a "fan" editor who has been sending in a job that consists of four or five single spaced and badly jumbled pages I have never been able to make much sense out of. From the very start I had given him the benefit of the doubt. I don't know yet what type of reproduction he uses, but it looks like a plain carbon copy from a typewriter to me, and with the first issue I suspected maybe he was limiting his circulation to me until he got some subscribers. I gave his effort good reviews, with tongue in cheek. His zine remained the same. He charged fifteen cents, which, if the zine was typewritten with five or six carbons, was worse than slave labor wages for him, but which from the standpoint of the subscriber was close to robbery. Finally, in desperation, and realizing that every reader who sent him fifteen cents for a copy would at once distrust my judgement forever, I suggested he lower his price and subscribe to a few other fanzines to get a better perspective of what such a publication should be.

The result was a long letter. And reports from a few people that he is proclaiming far and wide how he told off Rog Phillips. All of which leads to one minor change in policy in my reviews of fanzines—a change that will affect only one fanzine out of a hundred. From now on, if I don't think a fanzine worth the price asked for it, I will say so at once. The reason it will affect only one fanzine in a hundred is that nearly all the fanzines are priced far below what they are worth to the reader in entertainment value.

In fact, I'm going to go even further. From now on any reader who buys a copy of a fanzine I review and who thinks he hasn't received his money's worth in entertainment from it, and I haven't warned him in the review that it isn't worth the price, if he will send me the copy and a statement to the effect that in his opinion, it wasn't worth the price, I will personally refund his purchase price.

Two weeks ago I got an idea for a series of editorials for the *Club House* in which

I was going to make predictions of advances in science from the present to the year two thousand. Before I was through I had five editorials typed up, making what I thought was a very interesting series. On reading it over I thought maybe it might make a good article all by itself, so cut out the parts that made it a series of editorials, and turned it into a straight article. I discussed its sales possibilities with my agent and learned that it wouldn't find a sale unless its material was very conservative. In other words, a lot of stuff about reaching the Moon, and other things so obvious to the average stf enthusiast that four out of five of you readers could write it blindfolded. So I stuck a plot and some characters around it as an outline, and received an advance from an editor to make it a book length science fiction story.

Another example of the unexpected course events can follow developed in one of the amateur press societies, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, or FAPA. I have belonged to that group for a few years. Its membership is restricted to sixty-five, I think. I've had a guilt complex about being a member because it kept some real fan from belonging.

According to their constitution I was not permitted to review FAPA mailings in the *Club House*, and many of the members wanted me to review their zines because they were for sale to the general public as well as being distributed in the mailings. I was never quite sure what I could review and what I couldn't. So finally I decided to let my membership lapse, so that everything would straighten itself out. Not getting the mailings as a member, I could automatically review everything sent to me, and I would get nothing that I couldn't review. So what happens? The moment my membership lapses they have a shortage of members and ask me to review their mailing! You can't win at this game of guessing! And I've been wanting to review the FAPA mailings, because they are really interesting. I'll come back to them later.

The way events in the world are shaping up come uncomfortably close to the predictions in my story, "So Shall Ye Reap." When the Russians exploded an atom bomb in Siberia I received a letter from a woman who said "There are a few people in the world, thanks to SSYR, who know the truth of what is going on, and

the doom in store for man." I answered by saying that it wasn't so, that I, who wrote the story, didn't think it was prophecy, so she shouldn't. A letter came right back, thanking me for trying to reassure her, but facts were facts. Mankind was doomed.

It will really be very interesting fifty years from now to look back on this period, 1950-53, and understand a little more of what went on than we can now even guess at. Some of the things today seem utterly absurd. And the only ways they make sense seem utterly insane.

There are plans and cross-plans in operation in the world, and also planless events, all mixed up so much that there is no sure way of knowing the true value of any specific event. If I thought it would sell I could write out in detail my own idea of the meaning of events. But it would be purely my own, and I doubt if any editor would buy the result. All I will say here is that a lot of the seeming muddling is basically sensible deep underneath. But the spirit of confusion is infectious, and superficially at present the world seems entirely muddled. Even more muddled than the events themselves are some of the expert news-analysts' interpretations of them.

But there is a fascination in current events that is more than mere interest in abstract world events. It is the fascination of seeing things going on that could crash down on the individual at any moment. Letters from friends all over the country during the past few months have almost invariably included the question, "Why do you stay in New York, Rog? Don't you know that the atom bomb might drop on you any moment?" And driving through Long Island I see large signs on the highways that read, "In the event of enemy invasion this highway is barred to civilian traffic."

It's science fiction in the making. It's fascinating. It makes a gripping story from the televised Kefauver investigations to the crash of pins in the Korean bowling alley. And the underlying plot-formula seems to be, when they can see what's coming next, change it, but make it look like more of the same.

And in the midst of it all you sit reading this *Club House*. And three months before, I sat at my machine, typing it, a stack of fanzines beside me, threatening to fall over every time I hit a key, reminding me to get to them. I've worked myself into a mood. Right now I don't feel as though this is the present. I feel like a ghost in the remote past, back in the days of the era of confusion. I feel as though the present isn't here, but in 2029 or 22,254, or some other point far ahead, and that 1951 passed away long ago, leaving me trapped in it some way, forever at my typewriter, forever writing, while what I write has already mouldered into dust as age-yellowed pulp paper falls away before the ravages of time.

That is a secure position. These fanzines didn't come in during the month. They are a stack picked from a collection in a time

vault. The editors of these amateur publications are all dead and have been dead for countless centuries. But let's leave this year 2,354,864 A.D. and go back to that remote year of 1951. Why not? As collector's items the fanzines are priceless. Fantasy-Times, for example, as a collector's item, has a list price in the catalogue of twenty-two billion Kreduts, which could buy eighty million tons of wheat. But by a remarkable coincidence a U.S. dime dated 1951 or earlier has the same catalogue value.

So let's pretend it's 1951....

\* \* \*

*FANVARIETY* no.5: 10c; 6/50c; W. Max Keasler, 420 South 11th, Poplar Bluff, Mo.. Some of the best fan art I've ever seen, most of it done by Max Keasler himself. The combination of editor and artist is a good one. There are little illos stuck here and there and pointing up the word contents.

F. Towner Laney leads off with a rebuttal of a rebuttal of a... in an argument with Nelson on Dianctics. Laney is taking the side of pro instead of con in the debate, and I suspect he is doing so just for the sake of the argument. No doubt Nelson will come up with a reply article in No. 6 "The Caged City of Bombay" by T. E. Watkins is next. If it's a true story it's terrific, and if it's just fiction it's even more so. Written from the viewpoint of a GI in Bombay, it tells of a place where lepers are kept in cages.

Neil Wood starts the ball rolling on the subject of "A World Federation" with the thesis that pretty soon the world will have one government or be annihilated, and the editor invites the readers to present their own views on the subject.

A well written word picture of E.E. Smith and his stories follows. Criticism and praise, with a good mood ending. Then comes a short by Bob Tucker, well known pro writer that kept me chuckling. "Stay Out of Saloons," a time travel story.

A book review section and the "Ledder Box" completes the issue. Judging from the letters, this zine is very popular, and from its makeup and contents it is deservedly so.

\* \* \*

*PORTLAND STF NEWSLETTER*: 5c; 20/75c; Ron Allway, 1116 N.E. 6th, Portland 12, Oregon.. There is an accompanying letter which says:

Dear Rog:

I meant to write this letter with my first issue of the Portland Stf. Newsletter, but have been too busy. I took over as editor after the fifth issue, and have published three to date. It is the publication of the Portland fan group, The Atombies. Things have livened up quite a bit here since the Norwescon. The old club, the



Puss Fuss, otherwise known as the Portland Science Fantasy Society, has seen its day. Some of the members revolted in Sept. of last year, and organized our new club. We have been doing pretty good since. You know Jim Bradley, Allen Keeney and Mal Willits of Destiny, I'm sure; well, the three of them and myself are the four who started the club.

The newsletter comes out after each local meeting and acts as notice for the next meeting. You have seen Vol. 2, nos. 1, 2, and 3. What do you think of them? Hope you see fit to give us a review in The Club House. The price hasn't been on any of the former issues, as they were free, but it is now five cents for non members. I hear rumors that the Nolacon is going to be postponed. Hope not. If it isn't, I'll see you there.

Sincerely,  
Ron Allaway.

So far as I know, Ron, there has been no postponement of the Nolacon. In fact, I received a printed card from them not long ago that gave no indication of a change from the Labor Day weekend.

On to the Newsletter. I like it. It would serve as a model to other clubs. It varies in thickness, and has the notice of future meetings, news of local interest, and plenty of articles that would make it worth far more than the nickel cost to any fan anywhere. There's also a small classified ad section, with ads from the serious, "For Sale, 130 Amazings plus 5 quarterlies, \$65.00," to "Wanted, \$5.00."

In reading the Newsletter I gather that Portland has many new fans who became interested through the Norwescon. It has lost two of its most active fans, John and Dorothy deCourcy, who have moved to Taos, New Mexico, where Mack Reynolds and many other sf writers live.

\* \* \*

*Challenge*: 30c; a magazine devoted exclusively to poetry. Lillith Lorraine, Avalon World Arts Academy, Rogers, Arkansas. On the editorial page it says that this is the last issue of this zine, and that in the future all efforts will be concentrated on their other zine, *DIFFERENT*, which has a wider reader audience. Same address.

As a rule I don't care too much about poetry, and am therefore no judge of it. But in this issue I found one that even I thought was good. Only it should have been a story instead of a poem. Wanta read it? Okay, here it is. "Pinnacle" by Edith Ogutsch.

The dawn breaks chill; the sirens  
shrill,  
The robots start to bore and drill.  
The sounds into the bedroom creep  
And rudely wake the man from sleep.  
The rolling stairway takes him down

And rips his metal dressing gown.  
The food machine awaits his wish  
And starts to make his breakfast dish.

A metal arm slides from the wall  
And braces him, as he would fall.  
An unseen lever holds the door  
The man steps out into the roar.

The robots' rhythmic clangor frees  
A host of newfound harmonies,  
For underneath the robots' ward  
The world has come to one accord.

The man observes the gleaming steel,  
The spinning shafts, the humming  
wheel.

He sighs, moves on, without a plan—  
The earth's last lonely living man,

With nothing to anticipate,  
No future bound in child or mate,  
No point at all in drawing breath  
Except at last to welcome death.

Yet orderly the structures rise  
Without man's aid into the skies.  
What folly for the human drive  
To build so well, yet not survive!

\* \* \*

**SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTERS** 15c; Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. "The leading newspaper of the science fiction world." And in a lot of ways it is definitely that, though it will have to go a long way to equal Fantasy-Times on reporting the prozine developments. SFNL is a beautifully done photo-offset job, does a wonderful job of reporting the personal news, and has a huge circulation.

In this, the March issue, is a checklist of 1950 books and magazines, an announcement of a reader's poll underway, by Bill Austin of the Wolf Den Bookshop in Seattle, reviews of new books, news about "Books and Writers," and a column of real interest to you fans about people. Items such as, "Anthony Boucher has a sf murder yarn coming up in *Esquire*," and "Walt Sheldon, late of the Taos writers' colony, has returned to the Air Force." There's also a brief letter column that just gives pertinent excerpts of letters because of lack of space. And a few ads. (Advertising rates on request.)

It's published bi-monthly by Bob Tucker, whose stories you have read in *Amazing Stories* and other magazines, and in book form.

\* \* \*

**FANTASY-TIMES**: 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, L.I., N.Y. Published twice a month in order to bring you what is going on in the world of prozines before it happens. Taurasi is in regular contact with all the editors, and keeps informed on things. He has built up

a reputation for fast and accurate reporting over the years, so that the editors go along with him. Also he's accumulated a reportorial staff that includes M. Corpor, Europe; Vol Molesworth, Australia; Moe Diner, Canada; and Forrest Ackerman on the West Coast.

As an example of reporting, in the second February issue it lists the contents of a prozine that didn't appear on the stands until a month later. In the same issue it reported the details of a big sfan meeting in London, the announcement of the Second Ohio Sff Conference for May 19-20th, plans for formation of a nationwide sfan club in Australia, and, among other radio and film notes, that Republic's 12 chapter serial, "Flying Discmen of Mars," is now showing in New York City. And announcement of the marriage of a well known West Coast fan, Len Moffatt, to Anne Sinclair.

That's a crosssection of news in F-T. And it comes out every two weeks. James Taurasi is an engineer, and has made fandom his full time hobby for many, many years. In addition he's quite a collector of sf items.

So there are your two big fan newspapers. I'd say that they are supplementary rather than competitors. Both have huge circulations and both have been in business for years. I know both Tucker and Taurasi, and they are tops.

\* \* \*

**ODD:** "We dare them all!" 15c; Duggie Fisher, Jr., 1302 Lester St., Poplar Bluff, Missouri. A nice fanzine with an attractive offer to budding authors and artists. A free six-months subscription for accepted manuscripts suitable for the zine, a free lifetime subscription for some artwork, especially covers. The cover of the current issue is a dilly by Chabot.

The editorial announces that the circulation of ODD is up to a level that makes publication safe for the time being. But a letter comes with the zine which says, "Your reviews generally bring 15 to 30 subscriptions, and we can sure use them if we aren't going to go deeper into the hole."

Do you know that the island of Zambesi is overrun with fifty million cockroaches? It says so in ODD. (Almost as many as in Manhattan!) Or, that 36 black grylzaes can whip 22 Hurlkes? Or that a fact-finding poll among 1,000 doctors discloses that most people have minds?

But that's only the lighter side of ODD, and it would be odd if it didn't have one. Come to think of it, maybe it's odd it does... In addition there is "Scrapheap" by the letter hacks, "Nothing Sirius" by Elsberry, "Leaky Faucet" by the Drips, and "Destruction of the Iron Curtain" by Friedman, and a host of small items that are highly entertaining. And of course plenty of artwork. Best from the serious side is "Temperance on Venus" by Ed Cox, a good discussion on the discovery that the

white appearance of Venus is caused by dust instead of moisture, so that sf stories which have almost universally pictured Venus as wet are all wet.

That may be true, but I personally don't think so. There is the recently discovered fact that it takes dust to condense water vapor into droplets. It takes an electric charge, as proven in cloud chamber work, and in the atmosphere it generally means that the charge is a static charge on a bit of dust such as a microscopic grain of some salt.

One of the facts that clouds the issue of clouds on Venus is that our own atmosphere had enough aitch two oh in it to prevent any accurate estimate of its presence on other bodies. We can't see very far down into Venus' atmosphere. In fact, we can't see far enough into it to reach a true cloud layer. And probably from Venus the Earth would be much the same. We can see the surface of Mars at times, for brief moments. At least we think we can. But we aren't looking through as many miles of atmosphere there as we would have to see Venus' surface.

I was talking with a friend of mine who lives about half way between here and Sirius the other day, and he says that the Earth looks quite red from out in space, and nothing can be made out on its surface. He may or may not be right. The point I want to make is that we can't know until we can get out there and turn our spectroscopes to work on our own planet, the one we definitely know about. Then we can make comparisons. I still say that Venus is wet, and the dust in the upper atmosphere doesn't change that. Incidentally, I wonder if some astronomer with a spectroscopic attachment on his telescope has made an analysis of the blue of the sky? Maybe he would find it caused by refraction from dust particles a few hundred miles up!

\* \* \*

**P.L.A.N.T.:** costs one current sf promag or 25c for two issues; Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, N.Ireland.

About a year and a half ago I received the first copy of this only fanzine printed in Ireland, and was quite surprised at the high quality of it. In that issue Walt said his father had been a printer, and he—the son—was merely reverting to type. The number five issue, on hand for review, is as professional a job as you can find in any promag. Its forty-six pages are all printed from set type, with many illustrations in two colors. It has stories by Peter Phillips, D.R. Smith, Peter Ridley, H.T. McAdams, F.G. Rayer, Clive Jackson, and a co-authored story by Ken Bulmer and Walter Willis. The stories are as professional in quality as any in the promags.

In addition there are the strictly fan departments that a promag can't have. Fan news of Ireland and the British Isles in general, pertinent comments on the various

promags that couldn't possibly be included in *Amazing*, and many other things.

For example, "Proxyboo Services has now formed a central engram bank. We carry an enormous stock of assorted engrams, guaranteed to restore inspiration to the most hopelessly cleared author." How do you like that!

I wonder what engram keeps Mr. Willis from printing a few thousand copies and selling them on news stands in Ireland? As it is, his circulation is over three hundred, and growing. And I'd like to see it grow even more. If you don't keep your copy of *Amazing*, when you get through reading this one why don't you put it in an envelope and send it to Mr. Willis, and get his highly entertaining magazine for nothing? Or any other current science fiction magazine you have.

\* \* \*

**THE EXPLORER:** 50c a year; official organ of ISFCC, the International Science-Fiction Correspondence Club, which seems to be the answer to a lot of active fans' desires, because plenty of them have joined to make this an outstanding club. The zine itself is a sort of common denominator or focal point for the activity that goes on. Besides the editor Ed Noble, Jr., Box 49, Girard, Pa., that your 50c should go to, there's Larry Gage, trading mngr., Bea Glass, Kollektor's Korner. And the prex of ISFCC is Lawrence Kiehlbouch, Rt. 2, Box 223, Billings, Montana.

In his editorial Ed Noble announces he has emulated Rog Phillips and married an expert stencil cutter named Jo. Congratulations, Ed. But when you start putting your next issue together you'll probably find her using your mimeograph for her own fanzine.

Explorer is filled with articles and letters and personal news items that make it a nice homey zine for a group of fans. Looking it over is just like standing in the front hall of a house and hearing Joe and Dick upstairs, Ann and Harry playing ping-pong out on the back sunporch, Bill and Ed arguing about something down in the basement workshop....

\* \* \*

**RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST:** 25c; Garden Library Press, 1024 Keith Street, Berkeley 8, Calif. Donald Baker Moore editor. Thirty-nine pages, and each a work of multilith art with a lot of the pages in two and three colors.

"How Long is the Past?" by P. Ray Terit is a long and very interesting discussion of the various methods used to measure age of objects, from geological methods to the latest atomic methods. He says merely 100 methods for measuring age have been proposed, but most of them can be used only under special geological conditions.

Another interesting article in this issue

is, "Flight in Insects" by Raymond Wallace. You'd be surprised how much is being discovered about the various gadgets an insect grows to control and measure its air-speed, and other things necessary to flight. Even gyro stabilizers!

"The gadget story in stf" by Leland Sapiro is a dissection of "Piracy Preferred", a story by Campbell. And "A Little Plain Speaking", by Marion Z. Bradley, takes to task the fans who speak up against the editorial policy of this or that promag. Although her criticism is well put, I disagree with it basically. Her contention boils down to the assertion that magazines such as *Amazing Stories* are going to print what will keep circulation up, and fans aren't a big enough percentage of readers to have a right to try to get what they want in it. She says if they don't like the magazine, they should buy one they do like. I disagree, and I'm sure Howard Browne and Sam Merwin, the two editors she defends, will also agree with me that fan opinion is valuable and is always listened to, though not always agreed with. There are times when a hundred objections to something will be ignored, and other times when one small voice from fandom produces a drastic change in a magazine. Freedom to voice criticism and be heard is fundamental to our system of living, and I definitely don't advocate the policy of like it or leave it alone. Anyway, finding something to criticize or howl about is a lot of fun at times. You should see Howard Browne's eyes light up when a nasty letter telling him his magazine stinks comes into his office itemizing the reasons why the writer thinks it does. And think how boring it would be if all mail took the pattern, "Your magazine is wonderful and I liked every story."

And that goes for Rhodomagnetic Digest, too. I liked it all, agreed with a lot, and disagreed with some. In doing so I wasn't reading it passively. I was thinking along with its writers and its editors. And my eyes lit up when I found something in Mrs. Bradley's article to disagree with. I would not for the world have her swing to my side of the argument, because then there would be no fun. And Rhodomagnetic Digest has consistently kept its high quality.

\* \* \*

**IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR:** combined with DAWN; a magazine devoted to collectors; 15c, 2/25c; Russell K. Watkins, 203 Wampun Ave., Louisville 9, Ky. I don't see anything in it about collectors. Not even ads for or by the collectors. Nevertheless it's an interesting zine, and follows the lines of the old DAWN, the letterzine. An article, "If I could Live My Life Over" by Arthur J. Burks is very nostalgic, portraying vividly the ups and downs of a writer, and how in the long run the downs are as wonderful as the ups. "Let's Clean Up Fandom" by Russell K. Watkins says there is too much sex in fanzines. He

wants to start a group and gain a large enough number of fans to exert an influence against lewdness in fanzines. The trouble with such a thing is that it points out such zines and increases their circulations. But it's a lot of fun to have a crusade. Hope this one really gets going strong.

"Mail at Dawn," the letter department, gives the results of a chain letter circulated, asking two questions: "What effect do fanzines have on fandom? What effect does the increasing number of prozines have on fandom and on the quality of stf?" The answers are varied and all interesting.

\* \* \*

**NEWSCOPE:** 5c; March number, 7th issue. Lawrence Ray Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass. This newszine is getting right on the ball and shows promise of equalling Fantasy-Times in interest very shortly. Bob Silverberg is New York correspondent. Thomas Springall, Bill MacDonald, and Dick Nystrom are associate editors.

\* \* \*

**JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT:** 25c or ten issues for \$2.25, which is a boost in price, and takes it off my guaranteed value list. Its old price of 15c was okay, and at that price it grew in quality and value. Its new editor is listed as Robert Friberg, and subscriptions are to be sent to Gertrude Jurschak, 2970 N. Sheridan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

The Chicago Rocket Society holds meetings once a month in Roosevelt College. At present, they are having a discussion over the merits of building a space station before a moon rocket. It's an interesting problem.

The eleven pages of this issue are worth far more than the price to a rocket enthusiast, and I know of no other publication that provided the highly competent discussions and information contained regularly in the Journal. One thing that puzzles me is the six cent stamps used to mail it. In looking through my stack of fanzines reviewed this time I find that all the others of the same weight have two cent stamps on them. I hate to see this most valuable journal go out of sight in price and consequently lose subscribers. It would be far wiser in my opinion to institute economies, such as getting lower postal rates, eliminating the expensive envelope, etc., and keeping up the circulation or increasing it. How about it, fellows? This fanzine provides something none other can.

\* \* \*

**OVERDRIVE:** 5c; first issue. Tony Lubowe, 760 Grand Concourse, New York 51, N.Y., prex of the Brooklyn stf association. A very good first issue with a

story, "When The Moon Turned" by Bill Streifer that is tops. A stf quiz that tests your knowledge of authors is an interesting feature. They're inaugurating a letter column called "My Two Cents Worth" and will pay all letter writers whose letters are printed in it two cents. A nice follow up on the title. I wish you success, Tony, and lots of subscribers.

\* \* \*

**COSMAG:** unfortunately the price got omitted on my review copy. Editor, Ian Macauley, 57 E. Park Lane, Atlanta, Ga. This is the kind of fanzine I call a fanzine. Lots of fan art on stencil, short stories, and a real attempt to emulate the tried and true of fan literature and humor. It's going to go in for ads too, at 60c a full page.

\* \* \*

**WORLDS APART:** another first issue; 10c; published irregularly. Editor J.T. Oliver, 3401 6th Ave., Columbus, Georgia, who also authors "Jack and the Atomic Beanstalk" in the issue. Some very excellent fan art, a good short story by Paul Cox, "The House in the Badlands." A well rounded zine started with a sane attitude of not putting it out monthly, but just whenever the editor wants to.

\* \* \*

**FANTASY AMATEUR:** and all the rest of the FAPA mailing. Francis T. Laney, prex; Charles Burbee (whose wife is a wonderful cook), sec-treas. Official editor Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. Apply for membership in FAPA to Charles Burbee (whose wife is a wonderful cook), at 7628 S. Pioneer Blvd., Whittier, California.

I don't think I need to try to sell FAPA. It's too well known. Its membership could be called the bluebook of fandom. As I write this it has dropped below its 65 members for the first time in several years, and by the time you read this it will be up again and you'll have to get on its waiting list. But it's worth waiting to join. Some of the zines are reviewed elsewhere in this department, and some of the best just can't be had unless you belong, and get the mailing.

\* \* \*

That winds things up for this time. I've been down here in 1951 for several long hours, reviewing the fanzines. When I straightened up just now my joints creaked loudly, and the dust of the remote past, the era of confusion, fell off the wings of my flying suit in gray clouds. Oh me, guess I'll hop up to maybe 2763 A.D. and look around for some interesting goings-on that I might make into a nice little yarn....

ROG PHILLIPS

# The Reader's FORUM



## FOR MR. REED TO READ

Dear Mr. Browne:

After reading the May issue, I would like to cast a bouquet or two, and also fling a couple bricks. The bricks, all of them, after the fleeing form of Mr. Clinton J. Reed, who wrote that epic of bigotry to the Forum titled "How Normal Can You Get?" Mr. Reed apparently considers himself a one man circulation bureau, a diagnostician and statistician of diseases of the circulatory systems of any and all magazines published.

In one sentence he invites you to get a research bureau to determine reader interest in your stories, and in the following sentence, he generously spares you this expense, by giving you his opinion (i.e. research bureau's opinion) for free.

Not only does "distance in time and/or space cut down interest" but the stories he knows full well appeal to your readers are "rigorously accurate stories about possibilities that may affect our own lives..." In other words, if the locale of the story is not on earth, the time setting is not 1951 or earlier, and complete hero self-identification cannot be made, then Mr. Reed isn't interested.

What I'd like to know is whyinell does Mr. Reed read AMAZING and any other stf mags, when the type of story he wants doesn't represent .001 per cent of all stf published? I wonder if Mr. Reed thinks that all specialized mags operate year in and year out at a loss? Mags such as RADIO COMMUNICATIONS DIGEST, TELETECH, QST, THE SELF-SERVICE LAUNDRY and hundreds of others of this class whose circulation is confined *exclusively* to the people engaged in work which relates to their subject matter. Obviously, if he isn't very interested in amateur radio or an allied field, QST would be about the dullest reading I can imagine, but equally obviously Mr. Reed buys all mags of this type so he can call the editors and writers freaks because they don't write of his field, and all of the readers are likewise crackpots, because they enjoy the "insanely unbelievable fantastic things you can find in your magazine."

As long as freak Browne continues to edit the damned unbelievable things, unassisted by bigot Reed, crackpot Burwell will continue to creep out of his padded cell once a month, clutching a twenty-five cent piece in his hot little hand to purchase and enjoy his copy of AMAZING.

Henry W. Burwell, Jr.  
459 Sterling St, N.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia

*If Mr. Reed is still with us, he may wish to comment on Reader Burwell's cogent rebuttal. We'll give him all the space he requires—but he'd better know what he's talking about if he expects to make his comment stick!*

—Ed.

## DITTO

Dear Editor:

I have read a few letters in stf mags that sort of rubbed the wrong way. But never did one get the dander up like Clinton J. Reed's (May AMAZING).

Of all the conceited egotism! Dear Mr. Browne, aren't you happy to know your mag is only bought by a small group of insane people. I wonder how you have managed to stay in the business so long. I have an insane idea that C. J. Reed is the freak he mentioned instead of editors and writers of science fiction. Mr. Reed says, if I may quote from his letter, "Choose your market—a hundred practical people able to buy or one crackpot." Well, from his comparison of what stf readers should be to what they really are, I'll take my chances with the "crackpots."

Find enclosed a check for a year's subscription. I want to be sure of receiving AMAZING before those men in white coats come after this particular "crackpot."

But then again, why worry? According to Mr. Reed, (who seems to know all about it) I am going to have plenty of editors, writers, and readers of stf to keep me company in the nut house. See you there.

Mrs. W. V. Michaeals  
Route 1 Box 125  
Bens Run, W. Va.

*Mr. Reed's letter proved to be one of the best subscription getters we've ever printed. To date, 52 yearly subscriptions*

have been received from readers who stated specifically that they were thus showing what they thought of Mr. Reed's remarks! —Ed.

## DOUBLE DITTO

Dear Sir:

What are some of these people who write in trying to tell you what to print? Mr. C. J. Reed anyway. Science-fiction is what the name signifies—science-fiction. If he wants to read something sensible why does he read s-f? Like you said his story is as full of holes as Swiss cheese. The persons who buy s-f know what they want to read or they wouldn't buy it. Also this stuff about all pulps being trash. I can name a few smooth paper mags that are trash too. All pulp is not trash. I've read AMAZING STORIES, FANTASTIC and a few others for quite a while and this last issue should be put on ice.

Who drew the illustrations for this issue? The way they're drawn! They look like they're done by a three or five year old. And the stories, oh! Brother! Where did you dig up those? Usually you have such good ones, but these! Only two out of the six were good, to my notion. Those are "Ride That Stardust Trail" and "They Who Sleep." Also the Observatory was especially good. All those people who are worried about the A-homb ought to read this article. It should be reprinted in one of the papers that cover the U. S. A. It has a lot of sense in it.

I like your magazine as a whole, especially the Reader's forum. Some of the letters you get—Wow! Seems as everyone is concerned about the covers. Some of these people apparently think we are still living in the Middle Ages. The way they write!

I agree with Henry Malloy and not just because we both live in Kansas.

There is also another good s-f program on the air—2000+. Why don't they dramatize some of the stories in s-f mags and put them on the air? I've read a lot of good ones that I would like to hear on the air.

The lady who does not want her name connected with AMAZING STORIES—how does she buy the magazine? Have the guy who she buys it from slip it into her purse when nobody is looking?

Why not put the address to where your readers are supposed to write to get to the Reader's Forum.

Warren Brands  
2408 E. 13th Street  
Wichita 14, Kansas

The Reader's Forum, % AMAZING STORIES, Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y. —Ed.

## TRIPLE DITTO

Dear H. B.:

Forgive me if this letter gets a little strong in parts. If it does, it's because I feel strongly about what I'm writing.

Your letter column in particular has me in somewhat of a mild storm. Mr. Clinton J. Reed especially. Mr. Reed displays an amazing lack of knowledge of what he is talking about.

The starting paragraph of his letter is just about as irrelevant to the subject as it could possibly get. Also, whether Mr. Reed realizes it or not, he is the minority group, not us. I would heartily recommend "Einstein's Relativity Bulletin" to Mr. Reed if he finds present-day science-fiction lacking in applied science. It would be interesting to know just what Mr. Reed's idea of applied science is. Mr. Reed seems to be another Edwin Sigler minus the racial superiority complex. Mr. Reed states and I quote, "Choose your market—a hundred practical people able to buy or one crackpot." Exactly. Fandom's answer to the Reed's and Sigler's has, and always will be, "Nuts!"

On to pleasanter things. "Planet of No Return" was highly entertaining. Who is Lawrence Chandler a pen name for? Rog Phillips had the best short. Liston seems to be going places. Quite good.

The cover was fair, no better. Inside illos passable.

Jan Romanoff  
26601 So. Western  
Lomita, California

## THE REAL VALUE

Dear Editor,

Please keep the pictures of half-naked girls on your cover. You may not realize it, but this gives you the most interesting letter department of any s-f magazine.

Neil Blum  
2200 N. Kedzie  
Chicago 47, Illinois

By this time the subject of "bare 'em vs. bury 'em" has pretty well run its course. Actually, we have had but ONE "coolly dressed" lovely on AMAZING'S covers since the January issue. This doesn't mean, however, that we intend sticking to that ratio. The September issue will be an old-fashioned eye-opener! —Ed.

## READER WITH A HOBBY

Dear Sir,

While in a hospital last year, I began reading science-fiction magazines. Since I still have to "take it easy," I have lots of time to read and keep up with stocks at magazine stands and in libraries. I now have quite a collection of old and new. I also draw and paint and enjoy copying

illustrations and cover pages.

Am now interested in photographing some of the covers and illustrations for a collection to decorate my room. Will some of you fans—ten to eighteen years of age—write me your experiences and ideas in doing this? Also do you have magazines for exchange?

I am 11 years old.

Jack Downing  
325 10th Street  
Seal Beach, California

YOUR ORCHIDS MRS. WELCH!

Dear Mr. Browne:

The May issue of AMAZING which I have just finished reading, has sufficiently awakened me from my lethargy to send you my second fan letter. At the moment, I am enjoying both Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. Two and a rather potent highball. And that latter should be enough to shock the pruders.

First of all, allow me to congratulate you on your comments to the letters of Mr. Reed and "Name Withheld." Orchids, the white hybrid variety, go to Mrs. Welch for her letter, and a bunch of daisies to Mr. Newlin. Here are my own views on the subject of sexy illustrations and sex in the stories. Let's take the various points one at a time.

First, children. Being a bachelor, I don't have any children. But my friends who do have offspring are mature and honest enough to satisfy their children's curiosity, because they know it is a natural manifestation of childhood, on a level scaled to the age of the children.

Second, art or pornography? I agree with another of your readers that the pictures represent the individual's own ideas. If we can accept a Freudian explanation we might say that beautiful scantily-clad maidens are an expression of the desires of the id. In any event, I would agree with Mrs. Welch that any normal man must enjoy the mental titillation of a cover girl.

Last, the women in the stories. If we can believe the reports of eminent men published in the *American Journal of Social and Abnormal Psychology*, we must conclude that anyone to whom sex is not degrading or disgusting, enjoys the vicarious thrill provided by the love element in the stories. It seems to me that we are subject to enough attempted controls without submitting to extra-editorial supervision of our reading matter.

As far as the stories in this issue are concerned, in my inexperienced opinion, only "They Won't Believe Me," "Voyage of the Sitting Duck," and "Vampire of the Deep" are worthy of mention. They were good; the others were poor. Or maybe it's just a case of having read too much s-f lately.

One more item: In my last letter I intentionally included a basic fallacy on the

moon—bounce controversy. Although at least one person contested my logic, in a letter to the editor, no one noticed this fundamental error. I shall be glad to correspond with anyone who cares to communicate with me privately about this. Other correspondence is not solicited.

Allen May  
1618 Market Street  
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

Our thanks to Reader May for putting aside Rachmaninoff and glass long enough to write us his thoughtful letter. —Ed.

## PLANET OF COMPULSION

Dear Editor,

I have been reading your magazine AMAZING STORIES for 11 years. This is my first letter to you, but when I read "Planet of No Return" I just had to tell you how much I enjoyed it. Also every story in the May issue is very good.

I'd like to see more of Lawrence Chandler's works and H. B. Hickey—V. E. Thiessen, Burt Liston and Rog Phillips.

As for the covers, I think they are fine and the girls on them make them very attractive.

Mrs. W. W. Cloer  
8 Elizabeth Ct.  
Poquonnock Bridge, Conn.

You'll have more stories by the authors you name—and excellent stories they are! Chandler, for instance, is doing a novel for us which, from his outline, will surpass both "Forgotten Worlds" and "Planet of No Return." He's one of these slow, plodding workers, however, so it may be quite some time before we're able to give it to you. —Ed.

## SENSELESS?

Dear Editor:

I have been reading AMAZING for many years and I felt I just had to write. I am sick and tired about certain letters in your reader's column.

I am the last person in the world who objects to constructive criticism. But this senseless complaining about covers, quality of paper, etc. is silly.

I think the majority of your stories are very good. Criticism should be concerned with the quality of the stories and almost nothing else.

Sure, it's nice to hear from your readers about art, covers, etc. I agree that a lot of your features could be improved. But, I repeat, your stories are excellent and if you continue with these stories, I'll be reading your mag for many more years.

I would like to know what the readers think about this.

Let these chronic complainers read this saying: "I complained because I had no

shoes, until I met a friend who had no feet."

Seymour Schwartz  
421 Wharton Street  
Philadelphia 47, Pa.

*The point is, who will agree that complaining is senseless? Criticism of covers is as important to the reader who is interested in covers as is criticism of stories by readers who are primarily interested in stories. Are we to designate what readers can be critical about? Reflection will tell you that such an attitude on our part would be ridiculous—and probably fatal!* —Ed.

### ...FOR ARGUMENT'S SAKE?

Dear Sir,

I read your magazine quite frequently. Wouldn't say that I am a drooling do-or-die fan, but I do like the stuff. Especially the fan section. In it I find the queries and answers to a lot of problems confronting the guy on the street and the joe who, like myself, prefers to sit back and watch the parade of life flow onward to its bitter or beautiful climax.

By sitting back I do not necessarily mean a complete isolationistic viewpoint on life. It would be utterly impossible to achieve that end. But I do mean, by comparison one learns about oneself. It is thus necessary to see the other guy and his problems, misfortunes and tears to understand the real you. This sounds like doubletalk and it probably is, but it's the truth.

What has all this to do with science-fiction?

Plenty, brother. Plenty!

For example, your present running argument on the lewdness or indecency of cover illos. That in itself is enough to delight any Freud enthusiast. It represents an ageless argument that has, in essence, been bouncing off courtroom, office and parlor walls for centuries. Yes, I imagine it even got quite a kicking around in the caves of early man.

Before the famous eviction of Adam and Eve I seem to recall that Adam said to Eve, "Why do you wear skins? The air is not cold. You do not need warmth."

"But I am naked," the Mother Eve retorted, "and I am ashamed of my nakedness."

"Ashamed of beauty?" asked Adam.

And the argument has continued. Yours is but another phase of this argument and I predict that it will not be the last phase.

But to get into the present discussion in the Reader's Forum it is necessary to have a definite opinion. I have one, although I realize I am not alone.

I believe that if your artists are reading the stories and painting their interpretation of it as an expression of their souls, then let them paint nude women and

nude men, too. But, if, as I suspect, the scenes are being illustrated merely to attract attention and, thusly, sell the magazine, someone is in for a sad awakening. This someone does not exclude the buying public.

By the suspicion I mention above, I do not mean that I look down on the practice. The illos mean little or nothing to me. What I am interested in is the meat of the stories that are contained in the magazine. That, in my opinion, is the real seller of the book. For there are the thoughts of the entire publication—its editors, its fans and its authors. And it is the thoughts of scores of readers who buy a magazine because they have heard so much about this science-fiction. They read a tale or two and decide that, after all, the stuff has possibilities. In fact, it is good, wholesome reading.

What did you think about the first story that you read? Or were you enticed by a nude woman in a jungle background being chased by a horde of leering, slobbering Martians, and from then on in was an avid reader of any zine that had that type of cover illo? I wasn't!

To sum all this up in a few words, I personally think that the fans who complain are merely starting an argument for discussion's sake.

I should think they would argue about subjects that are more in line with the type of literature that is being presented them. For instance: What end science-fiction? Where is it going? What will it do when it gets there?

This letter has been long, perhaps too long, but it has a few abstract thoughts that needed saying on my part. I feel now that I have said nothing that hasn't been said before, but at least it was in my own words.

Jack Whitt  
209 E. Ave. C.  
Lewistown, Illinois

*Your assumption that science-fiction readers start arguments only for the sake of discussion is, we think, wrong. Such matters as what should go into illustrations, how much science should science-fiction contain, the value of trimmed edges, does a love interest add to or detract from such stories—all these and others are subjects of importance to the sf fan. That's why there's a Reader's Forum; the mere listing of stories in the order of personal preference by readers is not enough to justify such a department. Here anyone can have his say on any subject relating to the entire genre.* —Ed.

### FOR SALE

Dear Sir:

I saw a letter from one of your readers, in your April '51 issue, offering back number magazines for sale or trade, and



thought I'd write and let you know that I, too, have many of these, including AMAZING back to 1926, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES back to 1939, and many others. Also many books of fantasy and science-fiction, as well as other kinds. I will sell at very reasonable prices or trade for books and magazines that I need, or anything else that I can use. I hope you can publish this. I will answer all mail from readers if you do.

Carl W. Swanson  
Velva, North Dakota

### CURE FOR RESTLESSNESS

Dear Editor:

Most sincerely, I would like to thank you for the May issue of my favorite s-f magazine, AMAZING STORIES. "Planet of No Return" by Lawrence Chandler and "Voyage of the Sitting Duck" by Burt B. Liston were wonderful. Yes, wonderful! I read them both at one sitting, which for me is really unusual, as I am a rather restless cuss at heart. I hadn't enjoyed stories like those two in ages. They took first place in that memorable issue. Needless to say, I'm a-savin' it.

Excellent, too, was the rugged cover and illustrations for "Planet of No Return". Other stories worth reading were "Vampire of the Deep" by Rog Phillips and "They Won't Believe Me" by Graham Doar. That Phillips has a marvelous imagination. His ideas always strike me as fresh, as did one Nelson S. Bond in his heyday several years back.

Let me tell you, Mr. Browne, I was overjoyed a month ago, when I spotted a couple of long-missed mags on a newsstand here in Toronto. They were AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Due to our "mild austerity" plan, they, along with most science-fiction mags, had been banned in Canada for the past three years or so. But now, with conditions improved, they are back! Not that I ever missed an issue of AS or FA. Oh, no. American book dealers looked after me. Still, it is nicer to have them back on our own stands.

Some of your letters are intensely interesting. Particularly those dealing with flying saucers—and those that dealt with the Shaver mystery! Brother, there was something to jolt one into wakeful attention! I am afraid I have given up the idea of it ever being rekindled into life in AMAZING STORIES. Or can you give me a spark of hope?

Alex Saunders  
34 Hillsdale Avenue, W.  
Toronto 12, Ontario  
Canada

*Flying saucer stories are constantly showing up among incoming manuscripts—and those few with a good story woven around the saucers usually find their way*

*into our pages.... We are not using stories of the Shaver Mystery type. —Ed.*

### "I DON'T READ YOUR MAGAZINE"

Dear Mr. Browne,

I want to back Paul Ganley's stand on fanfiction 100%. A lot of fans have been doing their best to kill this "staple of the fanzines" for quite some time, and your attack was just another dagger. I don't read your magazine anymore, except the letters and fiction by Rog Phillips (and his fanzine review column). Rog is still one of my favorites!

I think you are doing an admirable thing (not to mention the fact that your greatest circulation probably lies that way) in providing a major science-fiction magazine for the juveniles. The fact that I can't stomach most of these "juvenile s-f stories" doesn't lower my estimate in the least. If a certain other mag hadn't been running similar slanted stories when I first started reading the stuff, I'd never have been able to enjoy Ray Palmer's slightly more adult AMAZING of those days. So, you have my best wishes.

But, need I point out that "editors who live in pulp houses" shouldn't throw stones! Can you realize that each issue of a fanzine is a part of its editor. If we are to believe in the soul, you might say that a fanzine contains part of the editor's soul. The editor almost invariably loses money on his magazine. And works longer hours than you, Mr. Browne. He doesn't draw a weekly pay check either! The writers of those tired little fanzine stories must work only in their spare time, thus, no time for polishing and plot reworking. I hope you won't take too much offense at this, but it is the way I feel.

I do disagree with Ganley on one point, though. His list of the five leading fan fiction magazines does not contain which I think should be on it. One of these is SLANT (the Irish fanzine) and two of your rival editors have thought enough of the fiction printed in this one to reprint two stories from it; the other is my own magazine, UTOPIAN (last issue was 40 pages; the next will be 60) and Rog Phillips said in The Club House of this one: "The stories in this fanzine are probably as near to professional quality as anything currently being produced in fandom." Also, I can't see how he can consider the less than twelve pages of stuff in BIZARRE as "quantity." I do agree that BIZARRE is tops in quality, though, and I even consider it above my own mag—and remember what Rog Phillips said about it!

I'm not really expecting you to publish the above, but I would like you to slip this little notice in your letter department somewhere. Anyone in Texas who sees this and would be interested in joining a loosely-knit Texas fan club should contact either me or Bobby Pope, Bessmay,

Texas. Only activity for a while will be a round-robin letter; only benefit, members will receive UTOPIAN (the leading mimeographed fanzine) free. There will be no dues or entrance requirements, at least until we start some genuine club activities. This latter will happen just as soon as membership is extensive enough to make such things worthwhile.

I'm a teen-ager, too; about six months younger than Ganley. But I consider myself an adult in intelligence and choice of sf reading.

R. J. Banks, Jr.  
111 So. 15th Street  
Corsicana, Texas

*Your observations on our editorial about fanzines bear only a faint relationship to what was said in it. We pointed out that the examples of fiction in the fanzines we read were not up to the standards our informant had lead us to expect. This in no way was a "daggers" aimed at such publications. We know how much "blood, sweat and tears" go into producing fanzines—not to mention soul. No one will dispute that they have a definite and important place in science fiction. However, none of these truths is relevant to our original premise.* —Ed.

#### NAME NOT WITHHELD!

Dear Mr. Browne:

I read with the utmost amazement the "Amazing" letter from "Name Withheld." I am certain that the reading public is grossly misrepresented if it is accused of being attracted by the things she mentions in her communication—namely "flashy covers, questionable ads, and sexually stimulating passages in the stories." I ask a specific illustration, please; will she quote me a few of such passages? I have read all current sf magazines for the past sixteen years or more. Mostly my favorites were ASTOUNDING and AMAZING STORIES, but I have read all types. The old ASTOUNDING was, to my mind, the best, but I complain of none being in the class she seems to have in mind.

To be sure, I've found all the things she mentions in every other mag on the market, except the religious ones, possibly, but one of my reasons for liking sf is its cleanliness, in comparison to the other kinds of reading.

Of course, I have other reasons, too—a stimulus for thought, interesting entertainment, the fact that I've gained some wonderful pen friends through a common ground of reading, and that I never need to hesitate in putting these magazines in the hands of young people who are my friends.

I see and hear with pleasure the trend in sf's direction in the radio, movies, and the comics, and may it continue, to the disadvantage of crime and love story and

gangland types of reading entertainment. I hope Mrs. N. W. has read "Doc" Smith, seen "Destination Moon" and heard "Dimension X", but I fear to inquire, and I wonder how much sf she is acquainted with. I have on file at present some five or six hundred and I wish she had 'em all to read.

I am in disagreement with only two authors, and they are Shaver and Bradbury. I don't like the morbid trend of their writing, it depresses me, but I will not ask that they be shot at sunrise. Because lots of others enjoy them, if I don't.

I enjoyed every story in the May AMAZING—the first one in particular. I'd like to mention the WONDER STORY annual's "Twice in Time" (not to be unethical). We all like Manly Wade Wellman, I'm sure. I've read it twice, and that is a compliment. Also a word of praise of a past good story by H. B.—"The Man From Yesterday." Only I would have liked a happier ending for him, and that is the opinion of many who read it, I know.

All the other stories mentioned in answer to Shear's letter in the Forum are fine also. More power to AMAZING, its editor, and its friends.

Don't withhold my name!

Ada Wilkins  
R. F. D. 1  
Wakefield, R. I.

#### HE WANTS A GIRL BANDIT!

Sirs,

I have been trying to locate a copy of the old time dime novel titled: "Automobile Lillian, the Daring Girl Bandit of Arizona" which was published by the now folded Royal Pub. Co. of So. Norwalk, Conn. about 1908, and so far I have exhausted all the usual book sources with no apparent success.

However, it did occur to me that perhaps some of your very special readers or contacts might very easily offer a clue that could lead to this most elusive of source books on our American cowgirl as we have come to know her—at least it is worth the try. Thank you and continued good success.

Chet L. Swital  
415 No. Beverly Drive  
Beverly Hills, Calif.

*This is a country mile outside of sf circles, Chet, but you never know where treasure turns up these days. If any of our readers can turn up the item you want, we're sure you'll hear from them.* —Ed.

#### SHALL VALAR MARCH AGAIN?

Dear Sir:

I have been reading AMAZING STORIES for a number of years, but this is my first time for writing to the editor

of this fine publication. I wish to congratulate you on the authentic description of Had-Sudol killing the giant cat in the wonderful story, "The Planet of No Return." I have also been reading a lot of jungle stories where cats were killed by club and knife, but the manner in which they were killed was all too infallible in this respect: From the true stories I have read of the lightning reflexes these giant cats have, unless the cat is in such a position as you described, no cat—no matter how old is totally helpless against a simple thing like a club or knife. I read one story where one cat ambushed a man and the man killed him with one stroke of a knife without stopping on his journey.

"The Planet of No Return" was wonderful, but I didn't like the ending. Why couldn't Ana-Bet take Valar back to Andara? You could then have another story of his adjustment to court life. Also have him fight in the arena against some out of this world animals and stuff like that. Why did Had-Sudol and Duleen have to die? All stories don't have to have tragedy to make it a good story. I would like to hear from other readers about my opinion of this story.

Why not have each author have an index so we readers can pronounce some of those out-of-this-world characters' names. It's no fun reading a story no matter how good, if you can't pronounce the hero's and heroine's names.

Leroy Patterson  
2120 Adams Street  
Gary, Indiana

*Darned if we know why Had-Sudol and Duleen had to die! But that's the way Chandler wrote it; and because their deaths made us have a strong emotional reaction, we knew it was good writing and a good story.... It would take a strong reader demand for Chandler to do a sequel to "Planet of No Return"—so if any of them do want to read more of Valar's adventures, we'd like them to say so. —Ed.*

#### WELL, FANS?...

Dear Editor,

I am a totally crippled ex-service man age 50 and live rather a quiet and simple life. However, I have an occasional bright moment in my life, and that is when I can manage to get a copy of a s-f magazine. In this I have been fortunate for I have received an occasional copy direct from New Jersey. Indeed I have your April issue of AMAZING before me, and enjoyed reading "The Glory That Was Rome" by E. K. Jarvis.

I have been an s-f fan for the past 30 or more years, and up to the war in 1939 could obtain copies of s-f mags from a shop in Praed Street, London, but when war came these supplies dried up.

I would be deeply grateful if you could

spare a small corner of "The Reader's Forum" to print this letter, and if any of your readers have an odd copy that they could drop in the post they would earn my deepest gratitude and a personal letter of thanks. I am not particular—any sort and condition.

I am not quite sure if I have done the right thing in writing you direct; I hope I have not transgressed in any way, so I am keeping my fingers crossed and hoping.

One thing more, if your readers do send any old mags, I hope they do not forget to enclose their address so that I may thank each one with a letter.

I am sure it will be understood that owing to currency restrictions it is impossible for me to subscribe to your mags, AMAZING and FANTASTIC, and can only ask for them as gifts, but when one is so desperate as I am for this type of fiction one will go to any lengths to get copies.

Well, my dear editor, you have my request. Now I leave it to you and your readers. I will mention here that both my son, age 21 and daughter, age 23, clamor for this s-f stuff, and I cannot satisfy this appetite—perhaps you will be able to do it.

Good luck and cheerio from England.

Walter J. R. Izzard  
15 Watson Road  
Long Buckby, Rugby  
Warwickshire, England

#### THE LADY WANTS A BOOK

Dear Ed:

This is my first letter to any mag, but I wonder if any of the readers of AS could help me. I've been reading AS and FA for the past three or four years when I could get them. Unfortunately, I never got around to sending in my sub. I've tried to save all I got but slipped up on the December 1948 issue of AS. I read the stories at least twice after a while and have just finished Part 2 of "The Return of Tharn" by Howard Browne. Has anyone got the last instalment? I'm glad you aren't putting out any more of those "continued next month" stories.

Most everyone sends their choice of first, second, etc. in stories of each issue, but, by golly, I like them all, no fooling. I've tried reading other fantasy and science mags, but AS and FA are the best so far.

Are there any of Richard Shaver's stories coming out again? And can I still get his book, "I Remember Lemuria?" I'd like to suggest an issue of nothing but R. S.—some of his past and future stories, or is there any way of getting all his stories in book form?

Another thing, I wonder if anyone has or can tell me where I might get a book. I read it when I was about ten, and it

was fairly old then, about Unknown Worlds—I think that was the title. I don't know the author, but it was published some 20 or more years ago. It's on the line of stf. Hope some reader might also give me the answer to that one as I'd really like to get the book.

Mrs. Dorothy Kelly  
Craig, Colorado

### THE SOLAR SYSTEM COMES TO EARTH!

Dear Editor:

I am certainly happy to find your mag on the local newsstands. It is the first time that it has appeared, at least since I started reading s-f a little over a year ago. Your companion mag, FA has never appeared and I hope to get hold of a copy some day—soon I hope.

I was extremely thrilled to find an approximation of the number of words in each selection. This is a wonderful help to me as I am starting out on a writing career soon, and I know, without counting just how long to make my stories for the best reader interest.

I started with Isaac Asimov's short, because he is the only one listed with whom I am really familiar, although I have read a couple of Robert Moore Williams' selections. "Satisfaction Guaranteed" was a nice story which I enjoyed very much. From there I went to "Some Distant Star" to "Let's Give Away Mars!" Now I have a question. Doesn't Cleve Garson know his geography? He should know that it is not necessary to name a town Mars, as there are at least three towns in the United States of America which already have that name. One in Arkansas and one in North Dakota are deserted ghost towns, but one in Pennsylvania has about a thousand and a half people living in it. Made to order, don't you think? Maybe they changed the name since then, but that's Garson's business, not mine.

While we're on the subject, I might give a little list I have compiled of "planetary" towns and cities.

Mercury—in Texas has about 500 people.  
Venus—Arkansas, pop. about 20.  
Florida, pop. about 19.  
Nebraska, pop. about 18.  
Penna. pop. about 100.  
Texas, pop. about 325.  
Luna—New Mexico, pop. about 70.  
New Mexico—ghost town.  
Jupiter—Alabama, pop. nil.  
Florida, pop. about 220.  
North Carolina, pop. about 75.  
Neptune—Iowa, pop. about 3,360.  
The asteroids are represented, too:  
Juno—Arkansas—deserted.  
Georgia, pop. 18.  
Tennessee, pop. 80.  
Texas, pop. 100.  
Washington...nobody.

We also have: Vega, Colorado; Vesta,

Arkansas; Omega, Alabama; Polaris, Montana and a Planet, Arizona. There are many more, of course, but you see what I was trying to do. The populations listed are probably greatly changed by now. The figures from the recent census will tell.

As I read the magazine, starting from the shortest story and working to the longest, the "Star Grabbers" came after the Mars short. Both this and "...Eternity" were swell reading. The "Glory That Was Rome" was a beautiful piece of work, but the cover doesn't depict any scene that I could find in the story. But I suppose that is up to the artist, whether or not he sticks to the story.

Yours is the first mag that I have come across that has those little short pieces at the end of each story. They are okay, but I read them all first, so as not to interrupt my reading. I am glad to see that you avoid any "continued at the end of the book" stuff. I hate hunting all over the place for the next section of the story, as is necessary in some of your competitors' mags.

Your fanzine review is the best I have ever seen, might I add.

I like the way you handle your reader's section, but I wish you would quit bringing up the subject of detective stories. I believe that you are a reader of such stuff. Personally, I can't stand much of it, although I have read a number of thrillers in pocket book form. I hope all s-f editors are not detective fans.

I'll look for your mag in the stands every month.

Robert Marlow  
Invermere, B. C.  
Canada

*Evidently Cleve Garson knows his solar system better than he does his own country!... And honest, Bob, detective stories are fairly respectable reading! We know three prozine stf editors who either write or have written and sold them! Their names will be sent to you in a plain wrapper upon request.*

—Ed.

### MR. JARVIS FLUNKS HIS LATIN

Dear Mr. Browne:

Congratulations! In case you don't know it, you put out an issue in which all of the stories were good. No masterpieces, but all above par. Usually, one or more of the stories published is so atrocious that it makes one wonder how it ever got past ye editorial wastebasket. Since all the stories were pretty much of a class, I will not try to put them in order of merit, but will merely give my comments on each as it comes along. Not that I expect any more than one person out of a thousand or so to agree with me, but I'll speak my piece anyway.

"The Glory That Was Rome"—Insofar as it went, it was slightly above par. How-

ever, it ended about two or three chapters too soon. Besides which, the theme of a new Rome, perfectly reconstructed for a madman's pleasure, is not fully developed. And if I deserved my mark for Latin midyears, wouldn't they speak Latin in Rome? Therefore, they would have had to say before going into the gladiatorial combat, that phrase "morturi te salutamus" in Latin as written here. Also they preceded it with "Ave Caesar!" But then, none of the stories were masterpieces, and this least of all.

"Satisfaction Guaranteed"—For lack of the proper adjectives to use I'll merely say that this was wonderfully executed and one of the best shorts I've seen in AMAZING for a long time. It was a nice new variation on the old robot story, taking into consideration the "unknown quantity." Maybe there's nothing new under the sun, but no law prevents us from using a new year's model.

"Let's Give Away Mars"—All I can say is that in some spots it was actually that unusual freak of nature, a funny science-fiction story. Of course, if you wanted to criticize you could ask how come the professor spoke Martian, but you would not want to do that, would you?

"The Star Grabbers"—Hickey did a nice job on that old story of poor enslaved Earth. This time it was the Martians. Very good, nevertheless. The title was the most appropriate one to the theme of the story I have seen in years.

"Find Me In Eternity"—Good, but... Though it's different, it reminded me of a story Rog Phillips did for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES a few years back—"The Involuntary Immortals." By the by, does anyone around, namely guess who?—know where I could buy a copy of the issue which contained it? November or December, I think.

"Last Touch of Venus"—Of course, as a member of the fems I am indignant at the idea. But aside from that I found that Crossen had dug up an old idea, put a new twist in its tail, and come up with an A story, and Swiatek's illo was the best in the issue. A perfect wedding of illustration to story.

"On Some Distant Star"—Had a neat ending, beginning and middle, and just right title.

All in all, this month's issue was only slightly less than excellent. Best so far this year.

On reading the letters, I was glad to see that I'm not the only person who reads science-fiction primarily for the fiction part, and not for the science. These readers who complain because an author sometimes uses poetic license with a minor detail, in order to get a better story, really shouldn't be reading science-fiction. If they want straight science, there are some excellent books on the market they could buy. If they want science first, well POP-

ULAR SCIENCE and others of its ilk come out every month. And, of course, there is always the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It doesn't cost a thing to read that. They've got to remember that science-fiction is just that—fiction with a basis in science, not science with a little story tacked on. But as far as Messers Ziff and Davis go, they don't need to worry until we paying customers stop buying AS and FA.

Before I land in the wastebasket, I'd like to sneak in a plea for more of the symbolic covers, like the excellent one used for "All Heroes Are Hated" in the November 1950 issue. (The one for "Vanguard of the Doomed" wasn't so hot.) After all, what has ASTOUNDING got that you don't in covers except ones that won't need to be hidden from the general non s-f-reading public. Thanks at least for keeping the one woman on this month's cover dressed. Keep up the improvement.

Arline E. Gingold  
60 Elm Street  
Ellenville, N. Y.

*We offered to send Mr. Jarvis, author of "The Glory that was Rome," to night school to pick up a little Latin. But he insists his next story will be about Pluto—and there doesn't seem to be any schools teaching Plutonium this year.* —Ed.

## WIN, PLACE, AND SHOW

Dear Sir,

No inner voice, no strange urging, nor any hypnotic trance prompts me to write this letter. No, I'm just writing because I feel like doing it. The last time I wrote to AS, it was in the midst of the Shaver craze. Ugh!

A few comments on the April '51 issue. A compliment: No half-naked gals on the cover. It always gives me a laugh to see the hero all decked out in space-suit, et al, and the heroine clad in the briefest of negligees, shooting off into space. (Which may go to prove which is the weaker sex).

Now, the stories: C. Creighton's "On Some Distant Star" was the best in the issue, because of the story itself.

"Let's give away Mars"—second, because of the humorous angle.

"Find Me In Eternity"—Interesting, and rates third for adventure.

"Last Touch of Venus"—also interesting. Fourth place—no special reason.

"The Star Grabbers"—When I finished reading this one I felt like I'd read Orwell's 1984 with a new twist. Fifth place.

"Satisfaction Guaranteed"—Mr. Asimov is slipping, I'm sorry to learn by this tale. It wasn't too bad, though. Sixth place.

"The Glory That Was Rome"—You mean you PAID Mr. Jarvis for this one? *Seventeenth* place.

Not to get away from the subject, but the request from Sgt. Catino in FA should be repeated in AS.

I agree with "Name Withheld" in the Forum about the stories. I enjoy the stories where the author isn't afraid to expend atomic fuel to get his readers out in the stars. But I slightly disagree with the above-mentioned person about "Destination Moon"—I thought it was a great picture.

Looking forward to the next issue of AS I remain respectfully yours.

Oscar F. Somerlock, Jr.  
203 N. Curley St.  
Baltimore, Md.

### THE LADY FELL IN LOVE

Dear Editor,

Once upon a time, pre-marriage days, I was browsing about in a musty, dusty, old book shop in N.Y. and I spied a great pile of old magazines. The covers gave great promise of what was between them, so for a small pittance, I purchased them. I never knew at the time that I was going to be bitten by a bug. But I was. After years of stuffing my head with all kinds of technical stuff—I found I could still be a good laboratory technician and read truly enjoyable things like FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, WEIRD TALES, and the like. My dad, a truly understanding guy bought me an entire volume of H. P. Lovecraft's stories. The bug kept biting.

Then I got married and came to live in Virginia. Three weeks ago my Cub Scouts helped to collect magazine and books to distribute to the boys home from Korea and recuperating in the Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

And that's when it happened! I came across two AMAZING STORIES magazines. Fell madly in love—and would like to know—how can I get some back issues? I can't bear to think I've been missing so much enjoyment.

Here in Virginia I am known as the Story Lady, with my own radio program and a Saturday morning story hour for little people.

I don't say I'm going to tell them the stories I read in your magazines, but, oh—how nice to wake up my imagination and brush away the cobwebs.

Please—do try to find a spare moment to let me know about your really fine magazines and how I can get some back issues.

Just what sort of magazines are you speaking of in the Club House section of your book? I'd like to know so that I may purchase more reading matter of this kind. I've combed all our magazine shops and the result is disappointing.

Good luck to your grand literature and thank you kindly.

Gladys Schneider  
10 Wahtah Ct.  
Portsmouth, Va.

*The best way to get back issues is through some of the contributors to these*

*columns who have such items for sale, such as Reader Swanson, whose letter appears this month... The magazines reviewed in the Club House are distributed through subscriptions only and are not intended as more than amateur publications. You'll find them quite interesting.* —Ed.

### REASON ENOUGH

Dear Mr. Browne:

In the Observatory of the 3rd section of the 1951 Spring Quarterly of AMAZING, you asked for the opinion of the readers on the subject of why we read science-fiction.

Well, here's mine. I agree entirely with Bill Hamling and I don't blame him for changing color. The biggest reason I read science-fiction is because I am interested in science, astronomy, etc., and I do like to have scientific theories explained. I do not belong to any fan clubs nor have I attended any science-fiction conventions, but I hope to do so someday.

I was very sorry to read about the death of Edgar Rice Burroughs. I followed his wonderful stories of Tarzan very closely. I also have read a few of his stories of Venus. I have never had the good fortune to see any of his stories in an sf mag, but I hope you have some and print them.

Most of your illos are good, but I prefer the spaceship and rocketship ones. This is the first letter I have ever written to any sf mag (or any other mag) so you should feel highly honored by receiving it.

"Weapon from the Stars" by Rog Phillips was the best story. Let's have more of Rog. Well, so long now and keep up the good work.

David Feese  
406 So. Kansas Barber Shop  
Liberal, Kansas

*We know how you felt about ERB's passing. We read our first Tarzan novel over thirty years ago, and the magic quality of his writing made a lasting impression. No fantasy or science-fiction writer, before or since, has ever been able to match the majesty and dignity of his characters, the breathless excitement built by their adventures, the believable atmosphere he gave to strange and incredible places. In latter years we became personally acquainted with him, and one of our most prized possessions is a letter complimenting us on "Warrior of the Dawn"—which, as anyone who's read it will tell you, was more Burroughs than Browne!* —Ed.

### NO GREATER COMPLIMENT

Dear Mr. Browne,

I wrote to Reilly & Lee, as you suggested and received a copy of your book, "Warrior of the Dawn." I tried the second-hand book stores and got some old copies

of AS and FA featuring stories by Burroughs. I also have "Warrior of the Dawn" in magazine form (with the wonderful illustrations by J. Allen St John) and "Return of Tharn," so I thank you.

May I ask what book company will publish "The Return of Tharn" in book form?

In reading the back issues of AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES (I only started reading these two great mags last summer) I deduced that the old magazines were better than the one put out now—no offense. From the old mags I met authors who were new to me, such as: Don Wilcox, John York Cabot and Festus Pragnell. I met characters such as Eando Binder's Adam Link and James Norman's Osker the Detective from Mars.

Do you know if any of the Adam Link or Osker stories were bound and published in book form. Can you also give me a list of all the Adam Link and Osker stories with the mags and dates they appeared in.

What ever happened to Don Wilcox? I think his stories like "The Eagle Man" and "Secret of the Stone Doll" were great. How about getting him to write a sequel to "The Eagle Man?" Also try and get Eando Binder and James Norman to write some new Adam Link and Osker stories. By the way, what comic strip has Binder been working on, and is he still working on it?

One more question, and I'll remove my drill and bit from your head and stop boring you! What were the dates of the AS mags that appeared in the first AMAZING STORIES Quarterly Reissue, also the date of the first AS Quarterly? I want the same information about the first FANTASTIC ADVENTURES Quarterly Reissue.

How about writing some more Tharn stories?

Alexander Fundukis  
629 West 135 Street  
New York 31, N. Y.

"The Return of Tharn" is not yet in book form but the contract for its publication has been signed.... So far as we know, the Adam Link and the Osker stories are not in book form. Binder, we understand, writes a good many comic strips.... The date of the first AS quarterly was the Winter, 1940, issue.... Doing a detective novel each year, in addition to editing two science-fiction magazines every month, makes our chances of doing another "Tharn" novel mighty slim. —Ed.

### LOVE IS BLIND!

Dear Ed,

Although I have been reading AMAZING STORIES for some time, I never did read

many of your letters to the Ed. But in your March issue, I did read them and I think that a lot of your readers don't even stop to think when they say they don't like your covers on your books. I personally feel that they overlook a lot of the other books, novels and magazines that are on the newsstands today which are a lot more based on sex and lush babes on the covers and on the inside, than your magazines are. Most of those magazines go into almost every home in the U. S. and all over the world. I would not have room on a whole page of your magazine to put all of the names of these other books.

I like your stories a lot—keep them coming and I don't care what you put on the cover as long as I know you have good stories.

As for me, I say you know what kind of cover sells your book, so put the one on that you want.

My thought: People should think of a book like a woman. No matter what she looks like, if you love her, you take her wherever you go.

R. E. Bartholomew  
A. A. 729-21-27  
Navy-VR6  
Westover A. F. B., Mass.

### NOT WITHOUT A WARNING

Dear HB,

I've been reading AMAZING since 1932 ...since I was thirteen, but I've never written to you before. There are many of this kind among your readers who accept what you have to offer. When the going gets rough and the stories are not up to par, we sweat it out and keep hoping they get better, and, they always do. We can understand slumps.

Anyway, I'll tell you two things. The last two covers were great improvements and I read the stories for their scientific and entertainment value, always allowing for give and take. So I'll keep reading and keep quiet until I want to stop. I'll tell you why before I do stop though.

Fred Romansik  
1039 Holmden Avenue  
Cleveland 9, Ohio

Fair enough, Fred! Nobody could ask for a fairer attitude from any reader. We'll do our best to keep you happy. —Ed.

### HEROES NEVER SWEAT!

Dear Sir:

I might be called an "avid science-fiction fan" and, also, being a chemistry major at college, I like to be on the look-out for any mistake in theory in the many s-f stories which I read.

At last I think I have found one, in the excellent story by V. E. Thiessen entitled "They Who Sleep," published in your latest issue.

In the story, the hero discovers that

the chemical in the vial was common table salt, NaCl, simply by tasting the solution formed on his fingertip by a little saliva and a single crystal of the chemical. I maintain this is impossible for two reasons:

1—The so-called "saline" taste is not a property unique to common table salt, sodium chloride. Potassium chloride, sodium potassium tartrate, and many other sulphates, nitrates, carbonates and such all have a salty taste, at least enough alike to be indistinguishable from one another by the rather crude (to say the least) test of taste, even when the solution is many times more concentrated than that made by one crystal in impure water.

2—This reason is, I believe, much more on the practical side. The hero had been sprinting around, avoiding the lethal impulses of a gang of out-of-this-world heathens. I should think that during this exercise he would have worked up quite a sweat. This sweat contains salt, NaCl. Yet the hero was able to tell instantly that the solution on his fingertip was also that of NaCl, even though it was mixed with his own perspiration. Rather far-fetched, what?

Thank you for your attention.

Michael Halpern  
175 Thayer Street  
Providence, R. I.

*If Mr. Thiessen can explain this one away, he's a better man than the editor!*  
—Ed.

### BARGAIN DAY IN TUCSON

Dear Howard:

Just wanted to note some comments on the stories in this issue of AMAZING and FANTASTIC. My wife and I get the entire collection of every science and fantasy mag on the racks, and we felt impelled to write for once—a thing we never as a rule do.

"The Glory That Was Rome"—straight out of Burroughs' Mars collection, is it not? However, we enjoyed it. "Satisfaction Guaranteed"—very interesting and well written. "Let's Give Away Mars"—excellent and very good humor. "Star Grabbers"—ho hum, let's give this to Mars. "Find Me In Eternity"—so-so, not good, not bad. "Last Touch of Venus"—enjoyed this very much, probably because we have a low opinion of women anyway. Even my wife doesn't like them. "On Some Distant Star"—very dull.

"Nine Worlds West"—so dull I couldn't get past the first page. "The Children"—very nice. Good idea. "Matter of Principle"—fair story. "In What Dark Mind"—also a nice twist. "Favors Can Be Fatal"—space opera, but nice. "Some Do It With A Look"—very good. This was our favorite issue this month. An excellent selection on the whole.

By the way, I have for sale mint editions for \$1.50 plus 15¢ postage each: "Gather Darkness," "Minions of the Moon," "When Worlds Collide, and, After Worlds Collide" (1 vol. ed); "Red Planet," "Waldo & Magic, Inc." "Castle of Iron," "Four-Sided Triangle."

And at \$2.50 plus postage: "Genus Homo," "The Bridge of Light," "The World Below," "Without Sorcery," "The Disappearance."

The copies are brand new (read only once) and no more shopworn than the average volume in a bookstore. These are a bargain to anyone, I'm sure. Any readers interested?

R. M. Kidd  
141 E. District Street  
Tucson, Arizona

### WE THANK YOU

Dear Mr. Browne:

David Shear's letter in May AMAZING, in which he suggests that your ability is wasted on being an editor, inspired this, my first letter to any editor. I want to challenge that "waste."

Since I can't remember from one month to the next the names of the several magazines I want to buy—so many astounding, astonishing, surprisings, and startlings—I buy 'em by the editor. Howard Browne is one I never forget.

An editor's job is more difficult than that of an author, since the editor must exercise a critical judgment in selecting stories, and in grouping them into a balanced issue. An author may select any idea, write what he will about it, and submit it—then he's done. The editor has to contend with hundreds of different ideas, compare stories from varying standpoints, and select, decide, choose. Then the job's only half done, since he still has to put the magazine together. Seems to me there's no comparison as to difficulty, or value.

Now to answer Name Withheld (con) and Mrs. Gaylord Welch (pro) on the subject of bare women on your covers. Every month when I stop by my newsstand, the little man who has waited on me for years asks if he should wrap the magazines. And every month I refuse to have the wrapping, on the grounds of refusing to apologize for anything I read. But by the time I get to the car, those covers are as big as a billboard, and twice as gaudy—and draw as many stares. So I agree with Name Withheld, at least in part. I personally should prefer more sedate covers.

However, I'm perfectly willing to admit that my preferences may not be quite universal, and that they are not perfect for being mine. If Mrs. Welch (and thousands more) happen to like nude art, more power to 'em. There's also the necessity for selling the magazine, and if lurid covers do the job, by all means let's have



lurid covers.

This seems a good spot to disagree with Mr. Clinton Reed, who apparently would have only one kind of story in your magazine. I am extremely fond of foie gras and chartreuse; I am also fond of crackers and milk. None of them would do for an exclusive diet. So let it be for fiction.

Since the principle reason for writing was to express my personal appreciation for your fine work as editor of a magazine I read regularly because I like it, I'll close with saying it's about time someone directed a cheer in the particular direction of editors and their particular work.

Please print any, all, or none of this letter, as you choose. I should prefer having my name withheld, not for any reluctance to have it appear in AS, but rather for privacy. That remains a preference only, since I'll stand behind all statements—particularly about editors!

Name Withheld

*To whom it may concern: The first three and last paragraphs of the preceding letter were not solicited by us, nor do they necessarily reflect the opinions of our readers and/or authors. But those four paragraphs made our work a lot lighter!*

—Ed.

## HE DOESN'T MINCE WORDS!

Dear Ed:

While browsing thru your May issue of **AMAZING**, I noticed something that made me just a wee mite angry. On page 150 of the Reader's Forum, I see a letter from some dopey woman that won't sign her name, this is the first thing that makes me sore. Then the raft of junk she put out about a good mag, this is the second thing makes me mad. Then your nice calm answer—I would have blasted her. In fact, that is what I intend to do in this letter. Nine chances out of ten, it will never get into your letter column as it will be too strongly worded, but I will feel better when I get it off my chest.

Anybody that doesn't have nerve or guts enough to sign their name to a letter as derogatory as the one that she wrote, I believe is called a Poison Pen author, and as such is just a little bit insane. Nobody pays much attention to them anyway.

I have read science-fiction for ten to fifteen years, and have seen some pretty rank letters, but that dame's letter took the cake. Anybody that is that dumb has a reason not to sign their name, I guess, but I can't see it. She sounds like something that escaped from the Snake Pit, somebody ought to take her back.

Ask her if she ever looked at the *Woman's Home Companion*, or the *Journal* or some of the other woman's mags. Some of their illustrations and ads are a hell of a lot more sexual than anything you put

out.

Me, I am free, white, and over 21, and I enjoy sex in stories and illustrations, and anybody that doesn't, in my mind is just a little bit warped, not quite as much as this Name Withheld I admit, but still she must be warped.

I don't even keep up with my personal correspondence, so you can understand that to write this letter I was just a little bit sore. I enjoy your mag and have for years. You have been improving it constantly with better stories and illustrations, but sex is an important part of it. Keep it up.

If you don't change it, you will lose that one gal, who I'm sure all fans would not miss. If you do change it just to suit her, you will lose readers that have been loyal to you for years.

Next time somebody writes a letter like that why don't you just dispose of it? Nobody would miss it.

Tell her for me, if you don't print this letter, just to keep her nose out of our mag. We like it.

And at least I got guts enough to sign my name to the correspondence that I write.

Glynn R. Davis  
Box 188  
Ashton, Idaho

No comment.

—Ed.

## FOR SHAVER

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for four years without commenting on the letters in the Reader's Forum so here goes:

In answer to Mr. Jon E. H. Barnes' letter in the May issue of **AMAZING**, you stated: "When the Shaver stories proved no longer popular we discontinued them."

The Shaver stories no longer popular! Where in the name of a green-blooded Martian do you get that? *Shaver is one of the best science-fiction writers today!* Whether there is anything to the Shaver mystery or not, he is still a darn good writer!

If Mr. Shaver's stories are so unpopular, why did several people write in asking you what had happened to him?

To you goes the credit of introducing the Shaver stories to the science-fiction world. Don't stop now! Please! Please! Please! Give us Shaver back!

The stories were good this issue as usual. Congrats.

Homer Cooke  
McKlesky Hall  
Snead Jr. College  
Boaz, Alabama

*Our statement was prompted by the opinions voiced by the majority of our readers. We can have no other guide for the choice of stories we publish.* —Ed.

## NOTHING UP OUR SLEEVES

Dear Editor:

Generally speaking—I have been reading s-f steadily for a good many years. Then your magazine stopped coming up here to Canada. Now about a year or so later it started again, for which I am very glad indeed.

I was very puzzled over the disappearance of Mr. Shaver. The letter column explained it, and I quote your own words, "When the Shaver stories proved no longer popular, we discontinued them. It's as simple as that." (AS—May '51) Now, is it really as simple as that? I remember your letter columns containing nothing but letters on where to go, who to see, caves, etc. You even once published a picture showing a photograph you claimed Mr. Shaver took in his own room at night. All through this, your comments always told readers that this was no hoax. If it was not a hoax, and you were trying to show the readers something, I can see no reason for the sudden stop. Were you asked or ordered to stop? The whole thing has a very bad smell. Very suspicious, indeed, and I'm not joking. If possible I'd like a more detailed explanation.

Your mag in general has not improved since I last saw it. Even though you have been publishing just about the longest time, I still consider it an average mag. The only outstanding story I remember right now is "The Star Kings." That one was very good.

Since the controversy happens to be about covers at the moment—get your cover artists to buy a copy of the "Conquest of Space." Nuff said. You'll see what I mean. That Bonestell is just out of this world, and precise, too.

I don't know what the policy is about mentioning other mags, but have you seen *GALAXY*? They've got a pretty good policy.

There it is, I guess—no brickbats, yet no bouquets either. Just go ahead printing and I'll keep on buying. I love all s-f. Oh yes, who wants s-f mags—in trade, of course. I've got hundreds.

Al Rosen  
4255 Maplewood Avenue  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada

*Our statement regarding the Shaver stories (May, '51) was quite true and no more involved than that. No orders, no bad smells, no smoke-filled rooms. —Ed.*

## INFORMATION, PLEASE

Dear Mr. Browne,

I could not help writing after I read the "Letter of the Month" in the May issue. Mr. Maloy's letter expressed almost to the last word my sentiments about **AMAZING STORIES**. What he says is, of course, true. AS and FA are about the only readable s-f mags on the market.

Note: Tell Rog Phillips to keep up those fascinating (fascinating is the only way I can describe them until someone develops a language better than English) stories. I liked "Vampire of the Deep" and the May Club House very much.

Questions: What date will the next issue reach the stands? Will you please send me some information on the Chicago Rocket Society?

Miscellaneous: I have several suggestions for "Mrs. Name Withheld." I will not give them here as I know you could not print them. If someone wants to talk that way, she should be man enough (in this case, woman enough) to sign her name without asking to have it withheld. I was happy to see Mrs. Welch's fine letter.

Jeff Lowenthal  
657 W. Buena Avenue  
Chicago 13, Illinois

*Amazing Stories goes on sale each month on or about the 10th.... Perhaps some of our readers will give you information on the Chicago Rocket Society. —Ed.*

## BACK TO THE CAVES

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have always liked the caveman adventure story, so you can just imagine my joy at finding one in *AMAZING*. "Planet of No Return" was tops! I hope the adventures of Valar are continued. He's another Tharn. Speaking of Tharn, how about writing another of his adventures for our readers?

I've been unsuccessful in locating the magazines containing two of your stories "Forgotten Worlds" and "The Man from Yesterday." Could you please tell me the magazines that they can be found in?

Joe Reitano  
163 East Third Street  
Mount Vernon, N. Y.

*"The Man From Yesterday" appeared in Fantastic Adventures in the August, 1948 issue; "Forgotten Worlds" in the May, 1948, issue of the same magazine. —Ed.*

COMING NEXT MONTH...

## A WORLD HE NEVER MADE

By EDWIN BENSON

Could a lone Earthman successfully defy an entire Galaxy?

A COMPLETE NOVEL

# GIVE MAN A HAMMER

By E. BRUCE YACHES

**Through the centuries, one idea has bound mankind together: build a better edifice!**

ON ABOUT every part of the globe, there are found traces of the almost fantastic skill of early man. It seems as if a race of giants had walked over the earth in the early days, erecting buildings which are practically beyond our imagination today. Men moving tremendous rocks for sacrificial altars, cults, graves. They piled up artificial hills and temple mountains. Out of solid rock they cut pillars, idols, monuments.

These prehistoric peoples seem to have been driven to these vast deeds by an almost monumental and mysterious longing. Aroused by priestly, ritualistic impulses or totemistic conceptions, they welded architectural and sculptural art with magic into a strange unity. They transformed it by the power of an almost violent, daring creative will—that same will that molded the statues on Easter Island and which could form a lonely rock in the midst of the South Seas into a sphinx-like creation of incredible dimensions. That same will that could create the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx—that could cut gigantic animals of legend into the rocks of India and China—or could raise in bygone ages the cyclopean cities of Peru, the great earth mounds of the North American Indians, the “toad” caves of the Rocky Mountains, and the animal mounds which often reached a length of several hundred yards.

This vast architectural energy extended into the great structures of the ancient world: The Chinese and Germanic walls; the temple of Jupiter in Baalbek; the great rock temples in Palmyra; the Buddhist temples of India and China; the caves of Ajanta and the grottoes of Lung Men. These latter are the product of continuous digging for thousands of years into the solid rocks.

But the real masters in handling these great masses of rock were the Americans. They knew nothing of levers or vehicles, and in Mexico they even lacked animal labor. With stone tools only, they broke off great blocks of stone, hewed and polished them so exactly that they could set them without mortar. Their work was so fine that even today it is still possible to insert a knife or even a needle in the seams. The labor of hundreds of thousands

of men created these monumental structures for the pre-Inca and Inca priest-kings. Built for eternity, they still surpass our best current efforts.

Simple in design, these buildings make up in the tremendous dimensions of their groundplans what they lack in height; none of them are over five meters high. Structures with a length of 1,500 feet and a depth reaching 500, are not uncommon in Mexico, where for the fortifications of the Inca's holy city of Cusco, 20,000 workers labored in shifts of three months over a period of fifty years.

These buildings, in some ways, still pose problems to the modern engineer. How were such great blocks of stone transported and fitted? A cornerstone of the triple-walled mountain fortress of Sacshuaman, for example, is over six yards high, three yards wide, and almost three yards thick. Among the ruins of the temple city of Tiahuanaco, there are sandstone blocks 25 feet long, 16 feet high, and more than six feet thick.

The use of men and animals on an enormous scale, aided by artificial mounds and inclined planes, is a favorite theory used to explain away many of the technical difficulties connected with the Egyptian pyramids and some of the other great ancient buildings. But in the case of Peruvian architecture, this theory falls flat—for there it was not only the problem of transporting these huge stones across land and fitting them into their proper places, but of how to move them across Lake Titicaca. This in a country where no wood is to be found for dozens of miles, and where only the reed raft has ever been used for water transport.

And how to explain the construction of the sun temple of Ollyantay—Tambo? Especially when one considers that it stands on the brim of a precipice hundreds of meters in height and that only a small footpath leads to the rock on which the temple stands.

Sure, we can say that the ancient Peruvians possessed highly developed technical devices like cranes and blocks and tackles, and even lifting machines of tremendous capacity. But since no sign or trace of any of this has ever been found—it remains to the present day a complete unsolved riddle.

# NO MAN IS EVER ALONE

AN

"AMAZING" VIGNETTE

By

MILTON MATTHEW

GERRY LOOKED at the thermocouples' readings—they were climbing steadily. He glanced over his shoulder at the stern bulkhead. In his imagination he could see the metal start to glow a dull red. He licked his upper lip. Already he was sweating. Was it that hot now?

He knew this was it. Spacemen live in constant dread of the thought. It is an ever-recurring dream which haunts their waking and sleeping minds. Gerry felt it near now. *He'd have to abandon ship.* When the 'dynes go out, there's nothing left to do, for that radioactive fire chews its way forward rapidly, converting the vessel into an atomic bomb. It happens rarely but it happens.

Gerry began to react automatically. He shoved the switches of the transmitter to "automatic" and let them pour out his varying fix, minute after minute. You could only hope that the monitors would catch and that they'd get a rescue boat to you.

He climbed into the bulky space-suit, checked its water and air liquid concentrates. The power pack was up and the short range transceiver was operating. Reluctantly he locked his helmet. This was the final step. This might be his tomb or it might be his hope. He could last for seventy-two hours—there was enough air for that—then blotto!

He glanced once more at the thermocouples. They were reading higher. He'd have to move—and fast. He stepped into the airlock and let himself through. Clinging to his suit were numerous chemical flares and a pulse-sounder. It would be a little easier for any potential rescuer to spot him if they got within range. He opened the airlock door without cycling the air and the little escaping puff blew him free of the ship.

With a small pulse from a hand rocket he checked his velocity and let the ship recode rapidly from him. As it moved away he saw the angry red glare of its stern, now radiating wildly into the visible, and the atomic "combustion" ran away with it. He watched the receding pinpoint of light. He knew what would

happen shortly. The twenty minute margin wasn't too much.

Abruptly, where the spot of rapidly swirling light had been, a miniature nova flared as the critical temperature and mass of radioactives was reached. The miniature atomic bomb went off in a violent glare of light and died in a fraction of a second.

Gerry stared hopelessly about him. He was moving as if in a dream. What do I feel, he thought? How can I tell myself—and believe it—that I'm floating forty million miles from Terra, alone in empty space, resting my hopes on a puny radio signal, which even if picked up, can't get a rescuer to me in time? Despair seized him. For a wild instant he thought of placing a rocket against his helmet and firing. Then it passed. He'd see it through. Maybe, as a last resort...

How puny are words to describe the vastness of interplanetary space to a single man set in its frame. Simply *nothing*—the most absolute nothingness, the absence of everything, the existence of not a thing—surrounded him. He was another chunk of matter floating in the Solar System and separated from every other chunk of matter by unthinkable distances measured in hundreds of thousands and millions of miles. He was the nadir, the zero, the depth.

Time passed slowly for Gerry. The minutes crawled—contrary to his expectations. The receivers made no sound. Only the rustle of his body against the interior fabric of the metal suit was audible.

These are the last sounds, he thought. These are—

Like the ending of a bad dream, the headphones crackled. Gerry's numbed mind refused to think. The words came at him.

"We've caught your coordinates and spotted he flare. This is the *Uantippe*—O.M. Fire a flare or give us a pulse if you're alive. Fire a flare..."

The message crackled on and on and Gerry reacted logically. An incredible sensation of relief swept him as he touched off a couple of rockets. No man is really alone, he thought, no man is alone...

# THE DYING STARS

THE ASTRONOMER'S knowledge of the universe has come to him through the medium of electromagnetic waves—of all lengths. His most powerful tool, of course, is the telescope which takes those waves in the visible range of the spectrum and concentrates them. It's not necessary to dwell on what the 'scope has done for astronomy. Just a shade less important is the spectroscope which enables an astronomer to be selective, to pick out and analyze the wave-lengths which interest him. Other instrumentation has extended his knowledge of the spectrum to both above and below visible light into the regions of the ultra-violet and the infra-red.

The most recent (and important) observation development in the long history of astronomy is the radio telescope. The results of its observations have been in the news lately. In Britain in particular, intensive work is being done with this tool. A radio telescope is essentially quite simple, consisting of a huge parabolic cup or dish, sometimes thirty or forty feet in diameter. This dish receives the radio waves from space and focuses them on a small antenna connected to the input of a highly sensitive receiver. The whole parabolic dish is set on a conventional mount so that it can be pointed at desired portions of the sky.

In appearance the apparatus resembles a huge radar set and, in fact, the first radio telescopes were made from surplus parts of such sets. A survey of the sky with such an instrument discloses some interesting facts. The frequencies exploded

vary widely but some of the most intensive celestial radiation has come in the centimeter band of wave lengths.

It appears from an analysis of the interstellar radiation in that field, that space is almost as heavily laden with "invisible stars" as it is with visible ones! This astonishing bit of information comes from the radio telescope's exploration. An examination of the intensity of the received radio waves shows hundreds of peaks of energy. It would appear that there are many, many stars radiating radio waves but not visible light. The only explanation for this is to assume that these are stars which have cooled off for the greatest part and are now sending out only the relatively long radio waves instead of the shorter, more energetic, visible light waves.

On the other hand, there is some suspicion that they are not stars at all but concentrations or clusters of interstellar gas, vibrating in some peculiar fashion. A third hypothesis has them as something yet unguessed by man! Could they be interstellar radar stations?

Actually there is little doubt that the "cooling-star" view will win out. Much more observational work must be done, of course, but radio astronomy is likely to be with us a long time. It is the source of much hitherto unsuspected information. We had known for a long time that the radiation wave-lengths from the sky varied widely, but until relatively few years ago, the existence of radio waves from that source was not considered. The cold ghosts of dying stars are pouring out their "swan song" in radio waves!

## OUT OF THE DARKNESS...

AN

"AMAZING"

VIGNETTE

IT WAS ABOUT twelve-thirty when the first alert sounded and the shrill keening of the siren was like an icy finger stuck against your skin.

I shook Marie roughly. "Wake up, honey," I said. "It's starting!"

She awoke, startled, the sleepiness going rapidly from her eyes. She caught the whining roar of the sirens. No explanations were needed. "John," she put her arms around me and I held her close, "no matter what happens, I love you," she said.

"Of course, Marie—we're together—that's what matters. Come on now, we've got to get dressed."

In minutes we were dressed and heading for the cellar. I had converted the basement to an air-raid shelter after the fashion of so many of the advisory pam-

phlets. There were first aid items, clothing, tools, canned food, bottled water, portable radio, writing materials—and even a Geiger counter though I didn't know of what practical use the latter would be.

Marie flipped on the radio. The speaker whispered into life.

"...twenty minutes ago," the announcer was saying, "radar intercepted large numbers of jets flying at extreme altitudes. After receiving no reply to attempted contacts, our interceptor-fighters and guided missiles are engaged with the enemy. We have already achieved some success, the Defense Command reports, but warns us that a bombing is inevitable. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is expected momentarily. Wherever you are, either head for the nearest shelter or crouch down behind protec-

tive walls. Interceptor Command does not know whether hydrogen or atomics will be used. We're in for a pasting but we can stick it through if panic doesn't grasp us. Remain where you are! Do not go out on the streets nor try to drive anywhere. Remain tuned to this station. We will keep you informed of all activities. Remember, from now on we are under martial law."

The station was silent for a time. Marie snuggled against me. My lips were in her hair.

"We don't really have to worry, dear," I said, "but the poor devils in the industrial areas will really get it. Thank God the deep-shelters have been built."

"People must be pouring into them like mad," Marie said. "It's better going underground than frying in the trap."

"Chicago's going to look a lot different if they hit us," I said apropos of nothing.

Just then the ground trembled—once, twice, three times. I knew that the sky outside was brilliant from that flare, but naturally I had no desire to peer out. What was doubly eerie about this kind of bombing was that there was no sound of planes or motors. The jets, both attackers and defenders were so high overhead.

The radio started: "...the city has been struck by three bombs—atomic—it is too early to report on effects, but we are certain that the loss of life is relatively low—

Do not leave your homes!" The announcer's voice sounded a bit of unintentional humor—"Chicago," he said ironically, "will look different in daylight!"

The radio droned on with orders and government edicts. News flashes of other bombing came through, too, but fortunately no tactical surprise had been achieved. The Sovs had hurt us, but not irreparably.

"I thought it would be more dramatic than this," Marie said.

"Wait until daylight," I replied. "Then you'll see what really happened." On the skyline, after a cautious peek through a window we could see the brilliant light of a blazing fire.

"The next weeks are going to mean work," I said. "All we can do now is to live by radio orders."

"I wonder if we've answered them," Marie mused. "Did our bombers hit them the same way?"

"I think," I said grimly, "that we've done a much better job." I shrugged, "Well the first atomic bombing's over here. Let's go up and have a cup of coffee. We might as well relax a moment."

And that's how we went through the bombing—there were no heroics and no real dangers—surviving the bombing was a question of doing a job—essentially obeying radio orders—and that was just as true for those directly beneath the blasts. It was impersonal... Charles Recour

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## IT'S A LOT OF WATER!

**A**RE the flood legends based on actual fact? Was the flood a local one, or did the story become so exaggerated during the course of time that it became a universal catastrophe permeated with moral and allegorical implications? What could have been the source of these floods? Rainstorms? Or were the subterranean waters somehow damned up? Did they originate in space? Where did they disappear? Were they only a series of torrential rainstorms, an inundation of lowlands, hills and mountains, or something more? A universal catastrophe spreading through the entire world?

The geology of a century ago had already claimed many such great floods, showing their traces in the diluvial layers. They were not only on the seashores and in the valleys of great streams but also far inland and in territory which excludes the possibility of local floods originated by oceanic quakes.

There are countless explanations of the flood legends. First—the defenders of the myth theory. These men claim that “a world-embracing flood is an impossibility.” They explain the flood legend as pure nature myth or as a well-constructed “allegory of certain occurrences in the heavens”, thus making the whole affair quite easy for themselves.

A second group explains the flood as a local catastrophe. Oddly enough, their leader is a master of geological science, Edward Suess. According to his theory, “the event that is reported to us under the heading of ‘the great flood’ was a partial inundation of the lower Euphrates. It was com-

bined with seismic floods from the sea, cyclones and earthquakes.” For decades this was considered as an undisputed dictum in scientific circles. That it did not explain why nearly all races on the planet possess flood legends, that local catastrophes occur nearly every year, and that no matter how large their devastation might have been the tradition of eons would not report such local occurrences—were facts not at all obvious to these scientists.

The old Greek philosophers recited many ancient traditions regarding the floods, which by now have assumed the characteristics of legends even if they do represent geological facts. According to them, land-bridges between Europe and Africa were torn down by earthquakes. Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt had formerly been joined by a great inner-connection of land, the coasts of which were slowly destroyed by the sea until only Cyprus remains. This assertion is supported by the Arabian scholar Abu-el-Ri'han Mohammed: “Between Alexandria and Constantinople there existed in bygone ages a land with firm and salty soil which produced a poor sort of fodder for cattle, and wild figs.”

This is the astounding point—that races supposed to be primitive had such amazingly modern and obviously correct conceptions of these calamities of fire and flood. They even arrive at a cosmic explanation for them.

The Egyptians taught that the floods were acts of heaven, which would return like a fever in certain periods. The stoics asserted that the moon was able to attract the subterranean seas and impound them. In Boeotia and ancient Samothrace the doctrine of periodic destruction of humanity was commonly preached and always in connection with great floods. And so on down the list of the early peoples.

But it seems as though only Horbiger's hypothesis of “glacial cosmogony” is able to solve the riddle of the universal floods and to give the final explanation. His theory consolidates variant facts into one point of view: that the glacial ages, the floods, the fall and rise of land are all part of one mighty cosmic sequence which attended the capture, increasing attraction, and final absorption of a satellite on the part of the earth.

Of course, even “glacial cosmogony” is only a hypothesis. But it surpasses all other theories in its unique ability to deduce the law governing the great floods and establish them upon a cosmic basis. It shows too that the flood which destroyed Atlantis was but one in a series of deluges which were caused by the increasing attraction between a moon and its mother planet.

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# NOTHING

by  
**PETE BOGGS**

"WELL, JIM," Professor Franklin said, "are we set?"

Jim Blakemore, his assistant, glanced around the spherical structure tubing which encased them and took one last look at the laboratory. He grinned.

"I'm nervous as hell, Doc," he said a shade too casually, "but I'm ready."

Professor Franklin smiled encouragingly. "All right then. Here goes!"

He reached over to the control panel of the time-machine which housed them and pressed a button. The keening whine of a generator rose rapidly. Then he turned the dial indicator, past ten-thousand, past twenty-thousand, past thirty-thousand!

His face grew sober. "Jim," he said, "we'll see the millennium. We'll go far enough ahead to get beyond Man's petty wars and troubles. We'll see a golden future."

He touched the motivator stud—and blackness surrounded them as the sphere was caught in the warped space that guided the time stream. The only illumination came from the dial lights. All else was blackness. No physical sensation of heat or cold penetrated their temporal or physical status. But the acute sense of isolation seemed almost physical in its impact. The keening of the generator was confident and sound.

Suddenly they were surrounded by light. This was forty thousand years A.D.!

Both Jim and Professor Franklin blinked at the sudden brightness. They looked around them. Outside the sun was shining, a sun little changed by time, unnoticeably so to the human eye. They were resting on a knoll fairly high so that they got a good view of the countryside. And a city could be seen a short distance away.

But there wasn't a speck of green! Nor was there a sound—not even the chirp of a cricket, though obviously it was a Spring day. The city could be seen clearly—what there was of it—a mass of broken stone and steel.

Jim and the Professor caught all of this in a single glance. Jim's white face suddenly riveted itself to the dial panel. The neon light of the Geiger was bright and the click of it had blurred into a solid note.

Professor Franklin reached for the panel at the same time as Jim did—showing the lever back to normality.

"We picked a world, Jim," Franklin said drearily, "a world which is dead and as burnt out as used coal. Man found and used the hydrogen bomb all right..."

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(Continued from inside cover)

as they saw it. I often wonder if the fellows who meet science fiction for the first time today are getting the feeling out of it that we did then. I like to think so.

Science fiction inspired the course of my studies through high school and college. I ended up in radio engineering as a result, but in the dim days of the '30's radio operators were quite unneeded.

I left my home town of Salt Lake City and wandered around Texas a bit. Later I took up the nomadic life of an installer of telephone exchange equipment for Western Electric. That was too nomadic for a married man, which I became in 1940, and I settled down with the Weather Bureau. During the war, I returned to electronics in the engineering department of Bendix Radio at Baltimore. Afterwards, I returned to Phoenix, Arizona where the climate is more amenable.

Since 1940 my science fiction writing has been going on at sporadic intervals. Like most other stf writers, I began it for fun and it still is. There's nothing I'd rather do than spend my eight bread-and-butter hours per day writing science fiction, and Forry Ackerman, agenting from Hollywood, has done a nice job of selling everything I've written for the past couple of years.

Unfortunately, the economics of the publishing business seem to dictate that an stf writer be a writer second and make his living elsewhere. No

matter how much he loves this stuff he can't support big blondes and fish tail Cadillacs with it, as is commonly supposed. In fact, there is difficulty with the midget blonde holding the dismembered doll. She has two brothers and two sisters—and they all eat.

I'm branching out to other, more mundane fields of writing now, to find some sort of compromise that will let me feed the little blonde and still get the enjoyment of science fiction work.

My stories have been all kinds—blood and thunder, and technical yarns so complex I wasn't sure I understood them myself. I have often attempted to combine a scientific problem with a human one, and these have made my best stories. Some of you may remember "The Children's Room" in *Fantastic Adventures* a few years back, and now currently appearing in *The Toymaker*. That's the kind of story I like to write. They are the hardest to do, and—for some reason I haven't figured out yet—still harder to sell.

I don't believe there is a story telling medium that can surpass science fiction. But somehow, I think we're still missing the boat.

Bob Heinlein and Ron Hubbard, in the best of their work, have shown more all-around skill than any of the rest of us in making stf a legitimate branch of writing. But they seem to be lost to the magazines now, and there has grown with appalling rapidity in the past year a pseudo-sophisticated, Edgar Allen Poe technique of accepting the most bizarre concepts of man's future life and throwing in a few characters to react. They succeeded only in looking naked or at best like the bottled specimens in a high school biology lab.

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